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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. 1.

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THE
WORD AND THE WILL

A NOVEL

BY

JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "BY PROXY," "UNDER ONE ROOF," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1890.



TO
LEWIS McIVER

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED BY HIS FRIEND

JAMES PAYN.

TO

FRANCIS WOLFE

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THE WORD AND THE WILL.

CHAPTER I.

MR. JOSEPH ADDERLY.

THE world is slow to recognise excellence on a small scale, and the name of Natchett-on-Sea may touch an answering chord in but few breasts, yet it is a very picturesque little place, nevertheless, and is called (by those who have property in the neighbourhood, and would like to let it on building leases) "the Scarborough of the West." It is like Scarborough, but looked at through the wrong end of a telescope. It has a Spa, but without the palatial residences surrounding it with which the rank and fashion of the east coast is so familiar, and Spa Gardens of a duodecimo size; it has also

a Castle in ruins, and with even less of it left; it has a bay, or a "cove that thinks itself a bay"; and a mile or two away a Flamborough Head, in Hendon Point, with a very respectable colony of sea-gulls. If it were within a hundred miles of the Metropolis people would rave about it, and many a lovely marine resort fast growing into public favour would find its nose put out of joint; but (which does not always happen among kith and kin) if it was nearer it would be dearer, a circumstance which would have prevented a good many persons in our *dramatis personæ* making it their place of residence.

As matters stand, Natchett, being both out of the way and un-get-at-able, is by no means a fashionable spot; but, on the other hand, it is—well, do not let us say cheap, but "suitable to persons of small means." Hither come genteel families, to what they call "retrench"; though the fact is, few of them have cause to reproach themselves with past extravagance, their object being to make their slender purses stretch as far as possible without the strain being remarked upon; widows and families of

professional men and officers on half-pay, whose incomes, or the larger part of them, have expired with them, the bread-winner—or at least the bread-and-butter winner—having died in harness and left the end and aim of his labours but half accomplished. It is what happens everywhere and every day; yet it is a sad spectacle. The mothers in houses in which they cannot take the old pride, forced to leave the neighbourhood of their old friends, to “cut and contrive”—nay, even to “pinch and pare”; the girls to be “buried alive,” and lose all their “chances,” as they are called. To the philosopher, of course, this “coming down in the world” is a mere nothing, but, then, poor ladies are rarely philosophers. That “crown of sorrows,” the “remembering happier things,” is always with them.

Where the Scarborough of the West differs most, perhaps, from its more famous namesake, is in the almost total absence of the male element. Except the fishermen, the parson, and the doctor—for there is not enough wealth in the place to keep a lawyer—there are absolutely no men in Natchett. If it

were a city in America (and "city" it would no doubt be if it were there located), it would be admirably adapted for a Mormon settlement—an idea, however, which we may be sure has never so much as crossed the Natchett mind, which is highly proper, and for the most part the reverse of humorous. There are no "carriage people" in the place, but (not to lose the interest of readers in the best circles at starting) there are several in the neighbourhood. In Natchett itself there is but a single fly; a "fly on the wheel" is a metaphor for insignificance, but a fly on four wheels, when it is the only one in a locality, is a very different matter. On the rare occasion of an evening party—for there is no dinner-giving in Natchett—this one was exceedingly in request, and in wet weather could name its own price up to three shillings. In such a case no guest could be ever punctual, but either came late, as the engagements of the vehicle permitted, or early. It was not thought "bad form" to come before your time; as to driving round and round, outside, in order to avoid it, as is sometimes done

in town, it would have been an outrage upon the rest of the company.

There was what is now called "a general consensus of opinion" (*vice* "it was agreed," superseded) that any *contretemps* or inconvenience caused by a deficiency of means should be ignored in Natchett. There was no competition in hospitalities. The evening refreshments were confined to sandwiches and sherry, with aërated waters, with the addition of negus in winter-time. If there was rivalry, it was in the aërated waters only, and had no reference to expense. Sherbet, and other curious drinks affected by teetotalers, were sometimes introduced as "something very highly spoken of." Had any hostess provided cold chicken, tongue, or made the least pretence of a supper, far less a sitting-down one, she would have been ostracized. "The common-sense of most" held lavish natures (if, indeed, any existed in Natchett) in awe.

An excellent example of this wise economy was offered by one of the few persons who could have afforded such superfluities, in the person of Mr.

Joseph Adderly, of The Hall. His mansion was situated at some distance from the village, yet in a manner overshadowed it. Himself and his doings were the chief topics of conversation; and, indeed, they were peculiar. He was a rich man, even in the sense in which wealth is spoken of in other places, and very ostentatious, but he was a miser. He had built the Adderly Free Library at Halsworth, the county town; he had erected the Adderly Public Fountain in its High Street; and both of them had the fact recorded on their foreheads. It was whispered that it was his intention to erect and endow an Adderly University, with a statue of its founder (let us hope not "in his habit as he lived," for that was a reach-me-down shooting-jacket) in its principal court; but, for all that, as we have said, he was a miser. If his kitchen chimney ever smoked to any unusual extent, it was because something was the matter with the flues. He gave no entertainments; he distributed no alms; and declined to assist all religious movements "upon principle." If he had been a poor man he would no doubt have been described

as an atheist; but being what he was, he had only "unfortunate scruples about religion." Perhaps it was so; but they were certainly so far fortunate that they gave him an excuse for not spending his money on it. He was rather a nice-looking old man, when he was pleased, though it was difficult to "catch him" (as the photographers say) in that attitude, for it was a rare one. He was tall, though very spare; had good features, except for his thin lips; beautiful white hair like spun glass, and looked as if butter would not melt in his mouth, which, indeed, it seldom did; in his food (unless he was dining out) he was an ascetic, though with no notion of fitting himself thereby for Paradise, and took dry toast with his tea.

About this unromantic and exceedingly well-preserved object there hung as much mysterious interest for the good folks of Natchett as though he had been a mediæval saint; only it was not with his past that they associated him—concerning *that* he gave them the amplest information: how he had started in life not even with the proverbial half-

crown, but with eighteen-pence, and by the exercise of all the virtues that were worth speaking about—diligence, devotion to business, and economy—had built up a colossal fortune. What they wanted to look into was its future application; and about that, save for some hints dropped in the ears of certain highly-placed individuals who concerned themselves with the subject, as regarded the Adderly University *in futuro*, he was exceedingly reticent.

If he had a weakness, it was to find himself appreciated by the county families in his neighbourhood, who, notwithstanding his public munificence, fought rather shy of Mr. Adderly. Having despised from his youth up all accomplishments of a social nature, and having little to talk about beyond his wealth and his virtues, he could hardly be called an acquisition to general society. If he could have screwed up his courage to be hospitable, he might have made some way, but this was as much beyond his powers as to be amusing; he failed in any sense to entertain. He would subscribe neither to the hounds nor to the volunteers. To the county

hospital he had subscribed, and largely, but upon the distinct understanding that its largest ward should be called the "Adderly Ward." "Confound the fellow!" Mr. Collins, M.F.H., had said of him; "I believe he would have given the Hunt ten pounds a year if we had named a puppy after him. I don't know what he made his money in, but I should think it was as an advertisement poster."

It was very well for Mr. Collins, upon his high horse, to thus regard Mr. Adderly, but society in the village looked at him from quite another point of view. They were equally aware that nothing could be got out of him while he lived, but they looked forward to his "cutting up" with the most lively expectations. Would he, or would he not, they wondered, at the last moment, when he could no longer grasp his gold and hardly his pen, bequeath any of his hoarded wealth to his two nieces, Martha and Mary Vance? These two young ladies lived on very small means indeed at Prospect Cottage, a name, though they had no hand in christening it, which was the subject of many a local jest—or,

rather, which suggested many repetitions of the same one. Their uncle had told them many times, not, of course, in answer to any inquiries, but out of the fulness of his heart (though it was really his liver), and from his innate pleasure in telling disagreeable truths, that he would never leave them sixpence beyond what would realize the income they now possessed; and when he gave utterance to a threat, Mr. Adderly was always found to be a man of his word. Still, he did supplement their scanty means by the sum of one hundred pounds a year, paid quarterly, and referred to it on every occasion when he came across them. "It's a hundred a year more than anyone ever gave *me* in my life," he would say; "and I should like to know what I get out of it? You, Miss Martha, are a flatterer, and *that* don't go down with Joseph Adderly; your smooth words don't give me one morsel" (he called it "mossel") "of pleasure; and as to Mary, she don't hate me as you do, because she hasn't the spirit for it, but she is as afeard of me as Old Scratch. Flattery and Fright, that is what I've sunk £2,000

in at five per cent., and it's the worst investment I ever made."

There was some humour (though he didn't know it), and also some truth, in this statement; but it was not a pretty one to make to two unprotected girls, the children of his dead sister, and the only kith and kin he had in the world. Martha Vance was three-and-twenty, and her sister a year younger; and both of them, as to appearance, calculated to excite tenderness in the breasts of most men; but Uncle Adderly was superior to that emotion! Moreover, whenever he looked at them (but especially at Mary, who "took after" her mother), he was reminded of the sister for whom he had at one time entertained the nearest approach to affection he had ever felt for any human being, but who had left the home he had offered her to marry a popinjay. So it was Mr. Adderly's custom to describe his late brother-in-law; though why a captain in the army, because he had no means beside his pay, should have been thus designated, it was hard to say. The marriage sundered the brother and sister; nor even

when the Captain fell in action did Mr. Adderly forgive the widow. In the forlorn hope that the ties of blood would induce their uncle to look favourably on her children, she had brought them, when she herself was nearing death's door, to Natchett, whence she departed in a few months without having had speech with him. Even the letter she wrote to him on her deathbed he tore up without reading. "I know what she wants," he said, "and *I* want no palaver." In response, however, to her appeal, or perhaps from the suspicion that "the county" would have its views, if he did nothing for the orphans, he set apart £2,000, the interest of which they were to enjoy, on good behaviour, during his lifetime, and the principal after his decease. "And not one penny more of my money will you girls ever see," he had told them, in his harsh, grating voice, again and again, as though the words had been put in a phonograph, and it had been his pleasure to grind them out from that delightful instrument.

CHAPTER II.

THE VANCES AND THE WALDRONS.

MARTHA VANCE would have been called pretty had she been seen, which seldom happened, apart from her sister. She had fine brown hair, and plenty of it; delicate and well-formed features; and blue eyes which, if a little cold, were bright enough. Her lips were rather thin, and were generally pressed tightly together, a circumstance which detracted from the temptation to press them with another pair. It suggested a certain hardness of disposition. It was this defect in them, perhaps, which helped to make her attempts to conciliate Uncle Adderly fruitless. They smiled, as the Scotchman confessed he joked, with difficulty; nor indeed was it to be wondered at, for there was little in her circumstances to create a smile. To the ordinary observer she was philosophic; no one but Mary ever

heard her complain; but she secretly resented her poverty, and entertained very bitter thoughts against the relative who, rolling in wealth that he used for no other purpose, save in his freaks of egotistic munificence, kept them so scant of means. Like most persons not much inclined to making friends, she had a high idea of the claims of kinship, and honestly believed that had she been in her uncle's place she would have behaved with generosity.

Almost the only thing about which she and her sister differed was the conduct of Mr. Adderly. She thought it infamous and abominable. Mary did not think it liberal; but in her gentle heart found excuses for him, which, however, only fed the flame of the other's wrath.

"He is naturally fond of money," Mary would say, "which of itself renders generosity impossible; and since he disliked dear papa, and quarrelled with dear mamma, he might have declined to help us at all. It might have been very hard and mean of him, but, of course, we had no legal right to anything, and he *has* given us a hundred a year."

Notwithstanding which charitable view of him, Mary shrank from her uncle much more than Martha did; his coarse and cruel words hurt her as though they were cuts of a whip; his sneers at her father filled her with unspeakable indignation; his reiterated statements that they need not expect another penny-piece from him were shocking to her, not on account of their menace—for she did not look for another penny-piece—but from their brutality. Her health was delicate, her nature sensitive; she was no more able to cope with him than a lily with a broomstick; she drooped before his frowning brow and bitter tongue. The reflection that afforded no little satisfaction to her sister, “This man is old, and the world will soon be rid of him,” gave her no comfort. On the contrary, it caused her to suffer anew, and upon his account. The thought of him heaping up treasure against the Last Day, on the edge of the grave, without a voice to bless him, or even a hand to take his own in friendship, was terrible to her. He knew that she feared him; but the last thing that was likely to enter Mr. Adderly’s

mind was that his niece Mary pitied him; but nevertheless it was so. Some people thought she was wanting in spirit; but if spirit meant detestation of her relative, Martha had enough of it for two.

Her uncle was quite aware of the fact, and it did not disturb him one whit; it even gave a zest to the contemptuous enjoyment with which he received her efforts at conciliation: he agreed with the cynic who tells us that everyone must be either feared or loved by his fellow-creatures, and that to be the former is much the more preferable. Yet in his heart of hearts he resented Mary's fear of him. It was too easy a victory for one so masterful. She was so gentle and harmless that there was no more satisfaction in treading upon her than in crushing a snail. He felt no remorse in doing it; it never struck him that a day might come in which he would have given all he had in the world in exchange for the memory of one kind word to her; but he took less pleasure in snarling at her than at other people.

She was very beautiful, but it had been a good many years since Mr. Adderly had been moved by beauty; there had been a time, if the gossip of Natchett was to be trusted, when he had not been impervious to it. Cupid's dart had, to use the Scripture phrase, "struck through to his liver" when it had been in a less unhealthy state; but there had been neither romance nor sentiment in it—only disgrace, with meanness added. No; Mary's beauty was nought to him. Her soft gray pleading eyes, her brown hair, more abundant even than her sister's—a gift, indeed, whose amplitude is too often associated with delicate health; her gentle smile; her soft low voice, so excellent a thing in woman; her slight but graceful figure—these were mere ciphers to him, items of no value. The expression that her whole countenance conveyed was spiritual, and, so far as he noticed it at all, he disliked it. Some people likened her to a saint, and if there was one thing which irritated Mr. Adderly more than another, it was persons in that line of business. He regarded them with the malevolence with which

a gargoyle on a spout looks on "the prophets blazoned on the pane."

Though Prospect Cottage was but a very humble residence, it really had a prospect; it was not like those lodging-houses at more popular marine resorts which call themselves Sea View or Belle Vue, upon the strength of a strip of blue only to be seen sideways, or out of a bedroom window. It stood in a little garden-plot of its own, sheltered from the north and east, but fronting what Natchett proudly termed the Atlantic. There was rather a doubt about this—though, except on rare occasions, it was not, at any rate, the Pacific—and cynical strangers called it the Bristol Channel. It was, however, a splendid view, and to Mary's eyes compensated for a great deal. She loved it in sunshine, and not less in storm, provided that she knew the little fishing fleet was safely in harbour, and that her friends the Waldrons had no anxieties about their dear George. Just now that gentleman was on the briny deep, on his return from India, and any "sea disturbance" was to be deprecated. Not,

however, that that term had been hitherto invented.

The date of our story is long before the era of "storm cones" and "weather forecasts"; it is the year after the Indian Mutiny, in the quelling of which George Waldron, though a civilian, had greatly distinguished himself. He had escaped from many perils, literally of fire and sword, but until she had him folded in her arms, his mother could not believe that he was preserved to her. She was no coward, for cowardice did not run in the Waldron blood, but the intensity of her love made her fear lest, having survived such amazing dangers, he might fall a victim to that insatiate hunger of the sea with which those who dwelt at Natchett were only too well acquainted. She shuddered in her bed at Castle Crag as she heard deep calling to deep in angry tones, and every foam-tipped wave that struck the rock on which her cottage stood seemed to have a knell in it. Her dwelling was midway on the steep on which towered the ruins of the old Castle, and commanded a still wider expanse than that of the Vances.

From Castle Crag, the ruin from which it took its name looks grander on its far-reaching promontory than from any other vantage-ground. Next comes the noble sweep of Natchett Bay, with the red-roofed houses of the village peeping out from its leafy shore; and then Hendon Head, steep and sheer, with its Jut, as it is called: the long low line of rocks, which even on the calmest day is fringed with foam, and when the south-westerns blow is lost in clouds of spume—a sight to be remembered. It is fortunate that the tiny drawing-room of The Crag has so magnificent an outlook, for one of its usual inmates, Hester, Mrs. Waldron's younger daughter, is what is termed in the more genteel circles of her acquaintances "a confirmed invalid," and in others "unable to get about." She has some incurable spinal malady, which confines her to her couch, where she lies, however, save when her fits of pain are on her, the brightest and cheeriest girl in Natchett. As a weight in mechanics is sometimes the source of levitation, so, though herself so heavy a burthen upon the scant resources of the house-

hold, her presence lifted its load of care, and even banished (save on her own account) its forebodings. "An everlasting bonfire light" would have been a description perhaps a little too strong for her, but she always seemed to be celebrating some joyful occasion, with combinations of fun and fancy. Old Mr. Gray, the village doctor, whose visits to her were as frequent as though he had been paid for them, once observed that if she could but have stood "bottling" she would have made a better tonic than any in the Pharmacopœia, to which she laughingly replied that he had done his best to get her out "of the wood." It was the only joke she had ever made to him which the old fellow had not welcomed with "deep-chested mirth," but there was too much truth in it for laughter; he knew that to get Hetty Waldron "out of the wood" was beyond human skill.

The prodigality of Nature is never more conspicuous than when she dowers with her choicest gifts those who are unable to use them. To have said that Hetty's life was a wasted one because she

had a wasted body, and was doomed to be carried from room to room by the hands of others till she should be borne to her grave, would certainly not have been true; but it was sadly marred by incompleteness. She never murmured at her own lot, but it was impossible to keep from her keen wits all knowledge of the daily sacrifices that had to be made for her, and the consciousness of them at times was so intolerable that, like the patriarch of old, she would wish she had never been born.

Curiously enough, all the really handsome and expensive things at The Crag, as the cottage was called for short, belonged to this penniless and crippled girl. In the little lobby on which the front door opened, and which it would have required an expansive mind indeed to regard as a "hall," stood the counterpart of Hetty's spring couch in the parlour—for only Hetty called it the drawing-room, "because," she said, like another Alice in Wonderland, "we draw there"—except that it had a hood and went on wheels. Notwithstanding its brass fittings, it moved lightly, and enabled its in-

mate to take the air without fatigue or pain; it was a mistake, she said, to suppose there were no "carriage people" in Natchett, when she took her walking-drives abroad. There were "musical instruments and that of all sorts" about the house—some of them quite rare, and adapted for the use of one who could only play them in a reclining posture—and beautifully bound books, very light in the hand. All these, too, were Hetty's, and were the gifts of her brother George. There was also a charming little piano, over which source of harmony there had been the nearest approach to a quarrel that had ever taken place between Mrs. Waldron and her son.

"We take half your income for our needs," she wrote to him in protest, upon the arrival from London of that instrument (carriage paid); "you are like the pelican (save that she was a fable) who fed her young with her heart's blood, in your generous kindness to us at home. I accept everything that is needful, and even comfortable, with thankfulness, not only to your dear self, but to Heaven for hav-

ing given me so good a son. I cannot even find it in my heart to regret the luxuries you bestow upon our darling Hetty; but superfluities for ourselves I will not accept even from your hand. She cannot, alas! play on the piano, and Maggie can get on very well without one. There is no excuse for such wasteful munificence. Moreover, since you never think of yourself, it is a mother's duty to think for you. I try to believe that with your simple tastes and self-denying habits you may have, as you tell me, 'really more money than you can spend;' but this self-sacrifice of yours cannot, nay *should* not, go on for ever. It is high time—we shall drink your health (in your own wine) a few weeks hence on the occasion of your seven-and-twentieth birthday—that you should think of settling in life. That you will ever find a wife worthy of you it will be hard to persuade your mother; but a wife and a good one I hope you will soon find, and you are not the man to 'marry money.' Then you will want what you have for yourself, and though you will never regret what you have done for us, because it has

made so much of what would have been hard for us easy, you will have reason to deplore what you must not think it ungracious in me to call unnecessary extravagance, such as the gift that arrived to-day.

“Maggie entirely agrees with me in this matter, as she will tell you; for of course we are all writing to wish you ‘happy returns.’ We want, please, to return the piano. We have not the heart to stay your gracious hand, whatever may be in it, for Hetty; but Maggie and I are able-bodied, and have no excuse for being spoilt.”

To this her son George replied, with the duplicity that did him infinitely more credit than the plain truth, which some people “feel it their duty to speak,” that the egotism of his sister Maggie was intolerable. The piano, it was true, had been directed to her, because it was for her use, but it was intended for Hetty’s enjoyment. The circumstance of Maggie being a skilful performer on that instrument, and passionately fond of it, had doubtless misled her into supposing it was meant for her;

but let her no longer lay that flattering unction to her soul: it was Hetty's piano.

This shocking falsehood deceived no one; but, of course, succeeded in its intent. The instrument was retained, and delighted two recipients instead of one.

"Please to play me something, Maggie, on my piano," Hetty used to say with the pronounced tone of a proprietress. "I don't complain of the matter," she wrote to George, in her humorous way; "but I can't help remarking that Maggie often plays airs upon my piano that are not *my* airs. There is nothing objectionable in them (I hope I need not say), but they are John's airs."

"John" was John Dennet, barrister-at-law, who had recently become engaged to Maggie. The cynical phrase, "His intentions were honourable, but remote," was unhappily applicable to him, though in no cynical sense; their engagement, indeed, promised to be such a long one that there appeared no end to it. His little income only just sufficed to keep him, and a third of a clerk, in an attic in

the Temple. From that elevation he looked around for briefs, and looked in vain.

Maggie, like the rest of the family, had a brave heart, and, like her mother, maintained her soul in patience. There were times when Hetty was alone, in which, like some fragile butterfly between two panes of glass, she beat her wings against the narrow cage in which her life was passed, and would that it were ended! But Maggie never murmured against her lot. When things went harder with her than usual—the news from John, notwithstanding his attempts to veil it, more depressing as regarded that *rara avis*, the solicitor—she would go forth among the wives and children of the fisher-folk and try to make things easier for *them*; it is a course much more recommended than practised, but she found the advantage of it.

She had none of the delicate beauty of her sister, or the spiritual grace of her friend and neighbour, Mary Vance; but there were people in Natchett who thought Margaret Waldron more like an angel even than John Dennet did. She was, in-

deed, rather too plump to square with our cultured notions of those heavenly bodies, and, so far from emulating their airy attire, she went about in wet weather in clumped boots and a waterproof. She was undeniably good-looking, however; she had bright hazel eyes, a fine colour, with a good deal of brown in it that spoke more of health than a sunshade; and a smile upon her rosy lips that had gladdened many an aching heart, and lighted up many a desolate home. She was said to resemble in feature the brother she adored; but in disposition she took most after her mother. She had the same calm resolution and independence of character, the same kindness of heart, and even, it was said, the same reticence as regarded her own feelings; but though she had inherited her mother's good sense, the doubtful gift of an excessive sensibility had been spared, or denied, to her.

No one suspected, indeed, that the widow herself possessed it. Her patient resignation and dutiful self-restraint, and still more the practical wisdom with which she managed her home affairs, concealed

from the world the memories and regrets which haunted that tender heart. The keen and loving eyes of Hetty alone knew of their existence, and even she was ignorant of their nature. Concerning them the widow made no complaint. When she spoke of her dead husband, it was always as her children's father, and with no relation to herself; but her thoughts were with him almost as much as when he had been alive. He had lost his life by an accident while comparatively a young man, and she (though very comely still; indeed, the gray in her hair enhanced her mature grace like the first snow upon the fell) had become an old woman; yet he seemed to love her as of old. His faults were all forgotten, including even the culpable imprudence which had prevented him from making due provision for his dear ones; his virtues were kept in constant remembrance.

No one guessed the real reason which had made the widow choose Natchett for her dwelling-place; that it was cheap and healthy no doubt contributed to its selection; but it had, above all, been the spot

where she had spent her summer honeymoon near thirty years ago. Outwardly she was far from emotional, but Mary Vance had noticed more than once in their walks together the tears rise to Mrs. Waldron's eyes as she gazed on the cliff or the bay, in their sunlit splendour, and wondered that the beauties of nature should so move her. Whereas it was not earth, nor sea, nor sky that melted her heart, but the thought of "the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that was still."

CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVAL.

ONE morning in early June the little family at The Crag were sitting together (though one, alas! was reclining) in the parlour as usual, but with a certain air of expectancy upon them. Hetty's pale cheeks were flushed, and though the hand with which she was making a little sketch of the Castle upon a small square of cardboard was steady enough, it was not so sedulous as it was wont to be. Ever and anon it paused, and she would steal a glance at her mother and sister. Mrs. Waldron was knitting with great assiduity. "For hours would she knit, would she not?" was a quotation Hetty had, not without reason, applied to her; but to-day she was literally knitting "against time"—*i.e.*, in order to pass it. Maggie was immersed in figures, the result of the week's expenditure, for

she was auditor of the family accounts—yet not so deeply but that she, too, would occasionally look up and listen to “the water lapping on the crag,” for no other sound came through the open window. Then suddenly the front door bell rang—that is to say, there was a tinkle quite close to everybody, as happens in a play on a very limited stage, and, as in a play, it had an instantaneous effect on all who heard it. The widow dropped her knitting, needles and all. Hetty would have dropped her cardboard had it been possible; it had no distance to fall, but she let go of it. Maggie dropped her pen, and for the first time disgraced the family ledger (price one penny) by a blot. Then there came a soft rap at the parlour-door, and in walked Mary Vance.

“Oh dear! oh dear! I am afraid I have disappointed you,” she said repentantly.

“Not at all, my dear,” replied Mrs. Waldron kindly.

“Well said, mamma,” cried Hetty approvingly. “The duties of hospitality before everything, even Truth itself. We thought you were George, Mary.”

"But George—I mean, Mr. Waldron—cannot possibly be here before three o'clock, when the coach arrives," pleaded the visitor. "It is only twelve o'clock, and I looked in thus early on purpose not to be in the way when he did come."

"That is just like you, Mary!" exclaimed Maggie, embracing her friend affectionately. "It was very foolish of us to be so dis—I mean, so deceived."

"Having shown the poor girl that she was an intruder, you are now accusing her of duplicity," observed Hetty gravely. "Never mind, Mary, take off your bonnet and come and sit by me. There is one person in this house who is still glad to see you."

"How can you be so silly, Hetty?" exclaimed Mrs. Waldron, smiling. "Mary knows she is always welcome here, whenever she comes—though, indeed, that could be said of her in every house in Natchett."

"Well, you see, she is the only possible heiress there is in the place," pursued Hetty remorselessly.

"No one knows—though everybody tries to guess—how Mr. Adderly will leave his money, and Mary may get it, after all. How *is* your good, kind uncle, my dear? When our carriages passed in the street yesterday, he struck me as not looking quite himself."

"Was he smiling?" inquired Maggie roguishly.

"Now, girls, I will not have Mary made uncomfortable," exclaimed Mrs. Waldron; and, indeed, that young lady was looking somewhat distressed, as she always did when Mr. Adderly was talked about, or, which was the same thing, alluded to disrespectfully.

"I beg your pardon," said the invalid; then, as the injured person leant down to kiss her in all good faith, she added innocently: "The fact is, I was mistaking you, my dear, for somebody else again, and thought you were Martha."

"You are a naughty, wicked girl," said Mary; and, indeed, it was a rather cruel speech, since Martha's detestation of her uncle was a very sore

subject with her sister. But Hetty could never moderate the sharpness of her tongue.

Dr. Gray once observed that she reminded him of Heine, of whose physical ailments he had probably read more than of his poems.

"I wish my verses did," replied Hetty. "The editor of the *Chronicle*"—the county paper—"won't have them at any price."

"But I saw some only last week in its Poet's Corner signed 'H. W.'"

"I don't say he doesn't print them, but only that he doesn't pay for them," complained Hetty.

She wrote and painted, not contemptibly indeed, but still not very well. She pretended to no inspiration in either art, and, to say truth, was instigated to attempt them by what persons of culture denounce as the lowest motives: the desire to make a little money that she might eke out her mother's scanty income. She had hitherto had but little success. She had realized half a guinea for a poem in a literary competition in a periodical which had the cleverness to describe as prizes the very

moderate remuneration it offered to its contributors generally, and fifteen shillings for a pair of hand-screens worked for a fancy bazaar. The last, however, was for a charity. The half-guinea was a *bonâ-fide* contribution to the family exchequer, and it had its place (though she little guessed it) in a little compartment in her mother's desk, along with a packet of faded letters and the first lock that had been cut from George's head.

"Yes, I am very naughty, I know," said Hetty, cuddling Mary's willing hand in her delicate palms, and looking like a penitent who has nevertheless good hope in the kindness of her priest; "but this is positively my last day of transgression. When George comes home we shall be on our best behaviour. The last time you saw him, by-the-bye, he writes, you threw a snowball at him. He never sees a snowball without thinking of you."

"Oh, Hetty, what nonsense!"

"Fact, I do assure you. Isn't it, mother?"

"Well, you see, it is ten years since George was with us," said Mrs. Waldron, smiling, "and you were

quite a little girl, Mary. As he has been in India ever since, and never even taken a holiday to the hills, he has probably not seen a snowball since; but he never forgets, dear fellow! anything, however slight, that happened at home."

"Nor forgives," observed the invalid gravely.

"Now, I really won't stand that, even in joke!" cried Maggie. "If George, as a boy, ever was angry with anybody—which he certainly never was with Mary—it never lasted a minute."

"I didn't say that his temper was not short," observed Hetty; "but only that his memory was long."

"If you talk like that," said Mary, laughing, "I shall not dare to come and see you again for a month."

"Very good. If you are not here to-morrow, it is certain he will come and see *you*."

Here the bell tinkled again, and this time it was accompanied by a noise of wheels. Maggie ran excitedly into the lobby, and Mrs. Waldron,

with a white face and tear-bedimmed eyes, followed her.

“Alas! I cannot go to welcome him,” cried Hetty piteously.

All her fun and frolic had died a sudden death. Her mocking spirit was cast out of her, and in its place was a blank despair. Her delicate features wore an expression of bitterness as well as of pain; her very soul seemed to be protesting against Fate.

Mary regarded her with heartfelt pity mixed with awe, while her trembling fingers busied themselves with her bonnet-strings.

“Do not leave me,” whispered Hetty, in such pleading tones as the other had never heard her use before. “Let him see that his crippled sister has a friend who never forgets her.”

To this appeal there could be only one response; but poor Mary felt exquisitely uncomfortable. She had come to The Crag at that early hour especially to avoid being in the way when George Waldron should arrive; and that he had done so hours before he was expected was certain.

The sounds of welcome and caressing, mixed with the dull thud of portmanteaus, came through the open door. They only lasted a few seconds, but to both girls, though for different reasons, it seemed an age.

Then hastily entered a young fellow, slight and of medium height, with a pleasant face browned by the sun, and a radiant smile upon it.

So monopolized was his mind by the sight of his sick sister, or so quickly did Mary fly to the window, that he was not aware of the visitor's presence. She sat with eyes averted from the pair and fixed on the sea, but she could not be unaware of some things that were taking place. Without a moment's hesitation the newcomer had fallen on his knees beside Hetty's couch; it had seemed to him, no doubt, the most suitable and convenient position for embracing her, and very natural, but to Mary's eyes it symbolized a touching devotion. Then tears were shed, perhaps by both parties—though, if by Hetty only, it was a circumstance amazing enough, for though others had wept for her, she was never

known to weep—and two broken voices made gentle murmur together. What was said Mary knew not, save that they were speaking the language of love. She shut her ears to it, and strove to think of other things; but for the first time the glorious prospect before her—the time-worn Castle and the waves no time can wear, the white-winged gulls that flecked both sky and sea, the red-sailed fishing boats that sought the little harbour, and were unloading on the quay amidst the cheerful sounds of voice and tackle which accompany that proceeding—had no attractions for her. Her thoughts, notwithstanding all efforts to the contrary, would recur to that kneeling figure by Hetty's side. She had not seen him since she was a child, but had heard much of him. She knew that, although no soldier, he was as brave a man as ever drew sword; that he had been praised as such by one whom all India acknowledged to be its hero; that at a time of extreme peril and despair, in a place cut off from succour, and surrounded by an immense body of mutineers, he had, without even authority to back him, placed himself at the

head of affairs, improvised a plan of defence, and, after prodigies of valour not surpassed even by the handful of British soldiers who at last relieved them, had preserved the lives of a score of his fellow-countrymen with their wives and children. For an instant only had she beheld his face: a bright and pleasant one, yet significant, too, of the strength of character he must possess; but it seemed to her now, should she never see it again, that she should never forget it. There was a likeness in it to her recollection of him as a boy—for, though high-spirited and fond of adventure, he had always been gentle and forbearing—but the gentleness into which its expression had developed was something altogether different from its early look.

To her view it had something chivalrous in it, such as might have been seen in one of King Arthur's knights; and, knowing how gallant a knight he had proved himself to be, the thought of him on his knees by his sister's couch was one that filled Mary's heart with an admiration for him little short of reverence.

It was Martha's way to decry the present—to say that the days of chivalry had departed; that men had no worship now except for gold. Poverty and the ignoring of her claims by him she sometimes described as her "own flesh and blood," but at others in very different language, had embittered her. She had become sceptical, cynical, suspicious; Mary did not blame her, but only deplored it. Here was a man of whose generosity and courage at least even Martha could have no doubt, and who had now proved himself as tender as true.

"So you are Mary, are you—if I may still call you Mary?" said a pleasant voice close beside her. And as she rose hurriedly from her seat a thin brown hand sought hers, and grasped it cordially.

"Yes, that's Mary, the girl that threw the snow-ball at you when you left for India!" exclaimed Hetty from her couch.

"To be sure; she threw it after me for luck, and thanks to her, no doubt, I *have* been lucky."

"Then you *are* going to marry the Begum, are

you? I was afraid it was off," cried the invalid cheerfully.

"Hetty is just as volatile and impudent as ever," observed her brother, smiling. "I am afraid you spoil her, Mary."

"Indeed I do not, Mr. Waldron."

"George, if you please, or I shall think you are not glad to see me," he answered gently. "Perhaps I have no right to suppose my old friends in England have such strong recollections of me as I have of them. They have had other things to think of which I have not had. But in your case I have heard so much of your kindness to Hetty that it is impossible to feel like a stranger to you."

"Artful creature!" murmured the invalid. "'A certain polite hypocrisy,' says the historian, 'is the characteristic of the natives of India,' and it is too often adopted by the settlers."

"Very good. I have letters, my dear, in my possession," said the young fellow grimly, "which describe the facts as I have stated them, and also give some lively descriptions of Natchett and its in-

habitants. I will show them to Mary, not only in corroboration of my word, but because I am sure they will afford her much amusement."

"If you *dare!*" cried Hetty menacingly.

Her letters had been humorous enough, but it was possible that some of them, which had certainly "made hay" of Mr. Adderly, and had not even spared Martha herself, would not have proved amusing to Mary.

George laughed aloud.

"That is the best music we have heard at The Crag these ten years!" exclaimed his mother as she entered the room, where she had purposely left him for awhile with his sister, and once more flung her arms about his neck.

"Well, I don't mind," sighed Hetty. "Music is not my strong point, but I do think that mamma's observation is a little hard upon our pianist, poor Maggie!"

"It is much harder on her and on all of you," said Mary, "that I should have intruded on you at

such a time as this. Pray forgive me, dear Mrs. Waldron."

"There is really nothing to forgive, my dear," answered the widow, embracing her; then she added a little inconsistently, "how could you have guessed that George would have been so extravagant as to take post-horses from Halsworth instead of waiting for the mail?"

"I am more than ever glad that I did it," observed the young fellow gallantly, as he accompanied their visitor to the door.

"I don't think I ever saw dear Mary looking so pretty," observed Mrs. Waldron. "There are some girls so happily constituted that confusion and even alarm seem to become them."

CHAPTER IV.

THE VICAR.

NATCHETT had probably very little in common with Athens—and certainly not Greek, for Mr. Harden, the vicar, was the only person in the place who knew a word of it—but they were alike in this, that the inhabitants of both towns were passionately fond of news, and always seeking “some new thing” to talk about. In the smaller of the two seaports it was more seldom found, and, therefore, the more highly prized. When Mary Vance left the door of The Crag, she knew that her society would have seemed invaluable to everybody in the village, as being the only person, except the members of his family (and the post-boy, who, coming from a region fifteen miles away, was unaware of his immense attraction), who had seen and spoken with the Indian hero. She might have made Mrs. Maitland, K.C.G.,

as Hetty had dubbed her (Knight Commander of the Gossips)—a lady who, if the noblest study of mankind is man be a true dogma, must have been a most cultured person indeed—happy with a word as she met her at the foot of the hill.

“Well, and how are you, Miss Mary? But I need not ask, for I never saw you with so fine a colour! I believe all that Dr. Gray tells about your delicacy is a mere conspiracy between you two, to enhance your value to us.”

“Thank you, I am very well, Mrs. Maitland, but in a great hurry to get home, lest I should be late for dinner.” And, with smile and a nod, Mary pursued her way.

The old lady shook her head, displeased at being robbed of a confab. “That girl’s colour is *too* high,” she murmured; “she has no business to pant like that from a run down hill; when I was her age *I* never panted.” Mrs. Maitland was now, however, very fat and wheezy—doing her best to restore the average in that way. “It my opinion Mary Vance is running down hill in quite another sense. It is a

pity it isn't her sister instead, for we could better spare her. My word! if Mr. Harden has not stopped her in spite of her hurry; I wonder if he has really any serious intentions about Mary, or, indeed, about anybody. He looks to me like a girl in boy's clothes."

Though a somewhat irreverent remark to pass upon one's vicar, it was by no means an inappropriate description of the Rev. Æneas Harden's personal appearance. He was tall as a Maypole, and as bald, but his whiskerless face and delicate complexion gave him an expression of extreme youth, with which the simplicity of his character well accorded. He looked particularly like a young lady whenever, as on the present occasion, he ventured to address one, and was troubled with a hesitation of speech which arose more from moral than physical causes.

Those were very superficial observers, however, who, like Mrs. Maitland, set down Æneas Harden as a milksop. He was a Christian first and a gentleman afterwards, and below those professions

(which he also practised) he never descended. His birth was good, and he possessed, no doubt, some family motto; but, whatever it was, that of "Sancta Simplicitas" would have suited him better. He was far from being a man of the world, and knew nothing of business matters; but the poor and the sick averred that he went about "his Father's business" with a diligence that no Vicar of Natchett had ever before manifested. He had only held his present preferment for a year or two, but the fisher-folk already adored, or, more literally, "swore by him." He had taken their hearts by storm within a few weeks of his arrival. A vessel during a violent gale had shown signals of distress, and though there was no life-boat in the little port, there was a craft that was used for such emergencies. As it was being launched under great difficulties, one of the crew met with an accident that incapacitated him from serving; and, when delay arose in finding a substitute, Æneas Harden, to the amazement of his parishioners, stepped quietly into the vacant place. He was not powerful, and it was complained that

his legs got in the way, but he was a skilful oarsman, and did his full share in a noble day's work. "That is the sort of parson for my money!" cried the coxswain (who, unfortunately, however, was as poor as a water-rat). "And so say all of *us*!" assented the crew; and they left their "Little Bethel" the next Sabbath morning and trooped into church, for the first time in their lives, to show their admiration of him.

At the present moment, therefore, there were two heroes in Natchett, though neither of them knew it. Mary might have introduced the newcomer to the other in (almost) the very words of the poet:

"Long-legged seaman, this is he, great by land as thou
by sea;"

but nothing was farther from her intention. Unwilling as she had been to speak of George Waldron to Mrs. Maitland, she was still less inclined to speak of him to Mr. Harden, though she could not (or, at all events, would not) have told you why. Awkward as was the vicar's way of paying his attentions to her, she knew what was in his mind with regard

to her, and regretted it; for she felt that she could never accept him as a lover, and to give pain to anybody, much less to one for whom she entertained so sincere a respect, was distressing to her.

As he stood beside her fingering his high white cravat, and playing with his black cotton umbrella (without which he was never seen), and blushing, he looked less like a lover than a begging-letter impostor caught in the act; but for all that, Mary knew what he meant quite as well as he did himself, and was almost as uncomfortable.

"So glad to see you looking so well, and so—I mean with such a wholesome colour, Miss Mary; but the hill is steep, though not quite so bad as that from The Crag, from which I saw you come; would my arm be of any service?"

"No, I thank you, Mr. Harden; it is only that I am a little out of breath."

"Dear, dear, that is bad! Yet Dr. Gray tells me you are so much better."

"There is nothing the matter with me now at all," she said, smiling.

"Nothing serious, of course not; still, we must—I mean *you* must, but the doctor always says 'we,' you know—be very careful. I suppose you found good Mrs. Waldron in a great state of 'expectation'?"

"Well, naturally," she answered.

Of course she ought to have told him all about Mr. Waldron's arrival; but she had really not a moment to spare.

Fortunately he did not pursue the subject.

"Miss Martha is well, I hope?"

"Yes, but, I am afraid, very hungry. I am late for dinner."

"Permit me to accompany you as far as your door. It is imprudent of you to walk so fast uphill. Dr. Gray, I am sure, would say so. Do not speak till you get to the top. I am so sorry about those periwinkles; any disagreement with a relative of yours is very painful to me."

"Periwinkles?"

Pressed for time as she was, Mary came to a full stop for a moment at that amazing word.

"Oh, perhaps your uncle has not spoken to you about it. It is only that he claims certain rights on the foreshore as lord of the manor, and these it seems include the periwinkles that are found on the props of the jetty at low water. He says that it is my duty to prevent the children stealing them, as he calls it. He wants me to preach against it. I really can't do that, can I? A pint and a half of periwinkles, they tell me, is the most that can be gathered in an afternoon."

Mary hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry. Her uncle's claim was absurd, of course, to the last degree, but also so unimaginably mean.

"It seems an insignificant matter, indeed," she said.

"Well, yes; but your uncle is so ob—— I mean so resolved about his rights, that I fear there will be trouble about it. You will, I hope, absolve me; my position is such a painful one."

"I am quite sure you will do what is right," interrupted Mary hastily; "there is Martha, as I expected, looking very impatient."

They had reached Prospect Cottage, and over the little gate that led into a strip of garden Martha could be seen at the open window, like Sister Anne in Bluebeard's Castle.

"I thought you were never coming," she called out. "How are you, Mr. Harden? Will you step in and join us at luncheon?"

The invitation was not so hospitable as it seemed; Miss Vance would have been willing enough to entertain him, but there was not enough for a third person, and she knew he would understand that. No one ever dropped in at any meal in frugal Natchett except to tea; it would in most cases have been embarrassing. Mr. Harden would have given his ears (and they were large ones) to have accepted her proposal, and would have been more than content with a hunch of bread and cheese, but such an intrusion was not to be thought of. What Miss Martha had called luncheon (for let us be genteel or die) was, of course, dinner.

"Thank you, kindly, but I have to go down to the seashore on business."

"About the fishermen and their periwinkles, no doubt," said Martha contemptuously. "Mrs. Maitland has just been telling me about it."

"Yes; I am afraid Mr. Adderly has taken an extreme view."

"On the contrary, a mean one," answered Martha acidly. "He will be coming into our garden after the snails next, and insisting, as lord of the manor, upon our lending him a pin."

Miss Vance had not the vivacity of Hester Waldron, but in speaking of her uncle she was sometimes stung into epigram.

"Oh, Martha! how can you talk so?" exclaimed Mary reproachfully.

The chuckle in which Mr. Harden had indulged himself was at once strangled in its birth. He assumed the air of one who, having committed an offence—or at least who is an accessory to it afterwards—can only hope that the devotion of a lifetime may atone for the transgression. The severest penance he could hit upon, at a moment's notice,

was to leave the presence of his "beloved object," and he lifted his hat and walked away.

"What a fool that man makes of himself about you, Mary!" observed Martha contemptuously.

"About *me*? What *do* you mean, Martha?"

"I mean exactly what I say. He knows perfectly well that Uncle Adderly is a brute beast, but just because you interpose with your ridiculous 'How *can* you?' he pretends to regret having thought him otherwise than human. However, since it is so, I do hope you will not permit such partisanship to go unrewarded. These chops, as usual, have cinders in them. 'Love in a hut with water and crust is (Heaven forgive us!) cinders, ashes, dust.' I wonder if it was the poet's experience of lodging-house chops that made him use that peculiar language. And to think that, if you only chose to say that little word 'yes,' you might have sweetbreads every day in the week for dinner."

"I don't care the least for sweetbreads," said Mary drily.

"No, but *I* do. I wish you would not be so

dreadfully selfish. You can sit by Hetty's sofa by the hour, because it costs you nothing; but though by ever so small an expenditure of words you could make your sister comfortable for life, you grudge it."

"You are not speaking seriously, my dear Martha, I hope," said Mary gravely.

"Perhaps not, but I *mean* seriously. Here is the only *parti* in Natchett literally prostrating himself at your feet—a good man, a kind man, a gentleman—and yet you will not let him kiss——"

"Martha!"

"Pray let me finish. I was going to say 'the hem of your garment.' You could not treat him more coldly if you were what you ought to be, one of Uncle Adderly's co-heiresses."

"That would make no sort of difference, if it were so."

Martha laughed with derisive bitterness.

"It is not necessary to dispute that statement," she said; "I speak of things as they are. The vicarage is the best house in the place. The vicar is the best man to be found anywhere, as I have

heard you say yourself, and yet you refuse to make him happy. That again is selfishness."

"There are worse things than even that," said Mary.

"Worse things? Of course there are. There is poverty, for instance; the necessity of looking after every shilling; the sordid cares that smirch life's very sunshine; the acceptance of alms from a closed fist."

It was terrible to see a woman, and a young one, so fierce and bitter. "Doubtless," she went on, "you think me selfish to talk in this strain. 'It is on her own account, forsooth,' you are saying to yourself, 'that she is urging me to this course.' You give me no credit for sympathizing with my sister's sad position, her delicate frame, her needs, her sufferings even."

"Oh, Martha, Martha, spare me! I am not suffering, save when I hear you speak like that. I have no needs which are not amply met, though doubtless by your own self-sacrifice."

"No; I went too far. It was ungenerous of me

to advance that argument, Mary. Forgive me! But since you have used the word, let me say in justice to myself that I am persuading you to make no sacrifice. If Æneas Harden were an old man, miserly as Uncle Adderly himself, but as rich, I can fancy your having scruples where I should have none; but he would make any woman a good husband. He is well off, well born, well spoken of by all who know him, and devoted to you. Compare what you are here"—she looked scornfully round the little ill-furnished room—"with what you might be; your every wish anticipated, your every want supplied, and independent of our uncle."

The last item in this description of Mary's future felicity would have seemed to most ears to partake of the nature of bathos; but it was not so with the speaker, nor with the person she addressed. In the sisters' eyes Uncle Adderly, though viewed by them in very different lights, was a person of supreme importance, and to have attained a position that would render his grudging gifts a matter of no consequence would have seemed to both of them

like sitting with the gods above the clouds in undying bliss. But even this argument failed to move Mary Vance.

"Let us talk of something else, dear Martha," she said quietly. "I have a piece of news for you. Mr. George Waldron has come home."

"Come home? Why did neither you nor Mr. Harden say a word about it?"

"Well, Mr. Harden did not know it."

"Why did you not tell him?" put in Martha quickly.

"I had not time—we—we were talking of something else, just as you and I have been."

Mary was conscious that her sister was regarding her with great intentness, almost with severity; that she was noting her high colour, and the hesitation in her speech, with an inexplicable interest, which increased her confusion.

"Have you *seen* him?"

"Oh yes, I have seen him. Hetty insisted upon my stopping for a few minutes, though, of course, I

wanted to get away. He took post-horses here instead of coming by the coach."

"He must be a rich man," said Martha, as if to herself.

"Scarcely that, I think," said Mary, smiling; "he was in a hurry, no doubt, to see his mother and sisters, to whom, as you know, he is devoted."

"Just so," said Martha drily. "You are eating nothing, my dear; but that is not surprising. The pudding has got cinders in it, like the chops."

CHAPTER V.

THE SPA.

THE Spa at Natchett was not in very high repute anywhere, and least of all in its own locality. The water ought to have been wholesome, for it had not only a horrible taste, but an evil odour, yet only one person believed in its miraculous properties. The exception, however, was of importance, for it was Squire Adderly. He owned the spring, and his beneficent soul would have rejoiced to see it benefit his fellow-creatures; he would in that case have given it every encouragement—built a temple for those who sought the fount, and let the Spa gardens on building leases. The fact was, however, nobody would drink the waters who could help it; but there were some persons who could not help it. Martha Vance was compelled to take a glass every morning. She had on one occasion, not imprudently—quite

the contrary; it was, in fact, solely to please her uncle, but without due regard to consequences—informed Mr. Adderly that she thought “they did her good,” though she did add that they were rather disagreeable. It was almost the only occasion that he seemed pleased with her.

“Well, mind you go on taking them,” he said; “if you do not I shall know it is just because they are a little distasteful, a proof of weakness of character that I should be sorry to see in you. Mary is a bit of an invalid, they tell me, and it will doubtless do her, too, all the good in the world.”

But Dr. Gray stepped in with his professional veto and saved Mary. He said that under no circumstances should she partake of that “beastly stuff,” an injurious epithet which it is possible he may have heard applied, in a moment of nausea, to his own medicines. If Mr. Adderly could have persuaded Dr. Gray to give him a scientific opinion in favour of the Spa, it is possible he would have paid money for it; but no money that he would, or even could, have paid would have extorted such a

testimonial. That there had always been a well at the Spa, the doctor admitted; but as for its exceptional qualities, he used to offer a similar explanation of them to that given by Dame Deborah Giles respecting the chalybeate spring at Buttercombe Parva. "Killibit Well! don't tell me nothink about your Killibit Wells, for it's all a pack of nonsense. A nasty taste has it? Ah, it's likely to be nasty; don't *I* know? Tinker's jackass was a-coming whoam years ago, with a load of salt, and dropped down dead there—that 'e did; and they buried him, salt and all, in that 'ere well. Nasty! why, o' course it's nasty; well it may be. Jackass and salt be at the bottom o't, that's why." Such a shocking story as that was not indeed told of Natchett Spa, but the legends in connection with it were of a kindred character.

Mr. Adderly's unpopularity of course accounted for some of them, and his method of advertising the virtues of his Spa for others. What he should have done was to have imported a scientific authority from London, with as many letters after his name

as possible, and have got a testimonial out of *him*. A conscientious man of science could (for a proper consideration) have surely written, "I dare not trust myself to say what I think of Natchett Spa as a remedial agent." Instead of which the squire went dropping shillings and sixpences about (itself a most suspicious proceeding in his case) among the sick poor, with a recommendation to try the Spa, like a cheap-jack with a quack medicine. He made old Sarah Jones custodian of the place, and forgave her the rent of her cottage by way of payment. But there was said to be a dreadful clause in the agreement, by which she was bound to drink the water, *and look as if she liked it*, whenever a possible purchaser of that elixir came within view. Hetty Waldron had christened her Rebecca, because of her always being found at the well, and Becky instead of Sally she was called by everybody. It is fair to say that the squire himself drank the water. He came down at intervals to collect the gifts that had been offered at the shrine of Hygeia (the precious liquid was dispensed at a penny a tumbler),

and carry them off in his carriage in a canvas bag; and always set a good example by draining a glass to the dregs with an imperturbable countenance. The hopes that were founded by some people upon this circumstance were doomed to disappointment. "He feeds on poisons, like the Pontic King, and they have no power," said Dr. Gray. "It is only like to like," said Hetty; "the man is iron, to begin with." At all events, he did drink it and survived.

On the morning after George Waldron's return home he visited the Spa in company with his family, partly from curiosity, because it was a new discovery since his day, and one of which he had heard a great deal (though, it must be confessed, not much to its credit); and partly because the road thither, through the public gardens, was a smooth and pleasant one, especially adapted for Hetty's conveyance. The young fellow took charge of that vehicle himself, controlling it with ease with a single hand, and at the same time leaving himself at liberty to converse with its occupant. It was a

pleasant but pathetic spectacle—the strong, lithe man leaning over the frail, crippled girl, and returning smile for smile as they moved along; while the mother and sister walked a little behind, happy in the contemplation of that devotion of Strength to Weakness, and thankful for the return of their dear one from the worst of wars.

George had twelve months' leave, a term so long that no thought of parting shadowed their happy present. They were talking of him, of course—they had always had him in their thoughts when he was abroad, and it was not likely that it should be otherwise when he was before their eyes—in low, loving tones, like the murmur of the bee about the blossom.

“How bright and young he looks! does he not, Maggie?”

“You did not expect him to be gray, did you, mother?” she answered, smiling. “He is but eight-and-twenty, you know.”

“But some men at that age look—well, not

middle-aged, of course, but they have altogether grown out of the boy."

She was thinking of John Dennet, and Maggie knew it. John was a little older than George, but looked much older. He had not, indeed, had so much experience of "brawling Courts" as he could have wished; but dwelling in "the smoky purlieus of the law" had aged him; that, and hope deferred, the delay of the solicitor's clerk in seeking his chambers; the doubt, though scarcely yet confessed even to himself, whether that messenger of joy ever would visit them. John had certainly grown out of the boy.

"I suppose it is a life of action," sighed Maggie, "always having duties to perform, and living in the open air."

"Nay, my dear, there is not much air in India," returned the widow, a little piqued at this explanation of George's juvenility, which could have equally well applied to a tiger-hunter; "and though, as you say, he has duties, and very important ones, they have not prevented him from cultivating the most

serious thoughts. His letters, indeed, except when, for our sakes, and especially Hetty's, he gives reins to his high spirits, are by no means those of a young man; I wish, for his sake, that they were more so. It is time that he was thinking of making a home for himself. Nothing would please me more than to see him happily married."

"That would be indeed delightful," assented Maggie warmly.

Though the consequences of such a step must have been obvious to them, it never entered into these two women's minds to regard it with disfavour because it must needs turn George's income—or the greater portion of it—into another channel than that into which it at present flowed. The word "self" was as completely blotted out of their vocabulary as "impossible" was out of Napoleon's. As the widow's eyes glanced at the invalid-couch in front of them, it seemed, however, to remind her of the circumstance in question.

"I do believe," she said, "that what has kept George a bachelor, or rather banished from his mind

the thought of marriage, is the necessity he feels imposed upon him of providing for his family, and Hetty especially."

"As far as Hetty is concerned," replied Maggie, "I have not the heart to say a word; but as for you, dear mother, I trust that, when John's talents get to be appreciated, there will be other sources——"

"No, dear, no," interrupted Mrs. Waldron, "that is quite out of the question. I cannot refuse the bounty of my own boy, but from another——"

"But will John never seem like a son to you, mother?" pleaded Maggie reproachfully.

"Yes, dear, yes," answered the other hastily. "He's a good fellow, and I love him for his own sake as well as yours; but you do not understand." The widow dropped her veil, and was silent for a moment, then added very kindly: "When you are a mother yourself, dear Maggie, you *will* understand; in the meantime be assured that I understand *you*; that I rate the treasure of your love for me—nay, of both your loves—at its true value. When John, as you say, becomes my son, my own needs, or rather

what George persists in deeming such, will be small indeed. They demand now no such sacrifices as he is constantly imposing upon himself; and if I have a sorrow in connection with him, it is the thought of them. They must be put a stop to; or, at all events, they must not be suffered to be an obstacle to his future happiness. I am sure you agree with me in this."

"Indeed I do," said Maggie earnestly. "I was thinking only last night, that if George could only take back with him, when he returns to India, a dutiful and loving wife—one we had confidence in and knew all about—what a comfort it would be to all of us."

"It is curious," answered Mrs. Waldron, smiling, "but I have been thinking the very same thing myself. All the thinking in the world, however, will not bring it about. We must let matters take their course. Dear me! that is Mr. Adderly's carriage; and there is Martha Vance."

Martha, however, was not *in* her uncle's carriage. It was characteristic of him that, though he had

overtaken her on her way to the Spa, or on what had become her way when she caught sight of him, he had not even offered her a seat. She could get down there as quickly, walking through the Spa gardens, as he on wheels round by the road. But that was not the reason of his discourtesy; it would never have done to put her on a level with himself, by bestowing on her such a mark of honour and relationship. It might have encouraged false hopes in her, or, what he resented much more, the notion in the public mind that he and his niece were on familiar terms. She would have to go on foot all the days of her life, and therefore it was ridiculous to accustom her, even so far as five minutes could do it, to riding in a carriage. The very idea of such a thing, and, perhaps, some dim consciousness of having done a boorish thing, which in natures like his makes a man more of a boor than ever, brought a scowl into his face. He was standing by the Spa with a glass in his hand, and so was his niece, but they did not give the impression of drinking one another's health at all. He didn't like her making

faces at the unpalatable draught, which she could not help doing. He also, as usual, suspected Rebecca of having pocketed some of the tribute that he had come for.

"There is twopence less than there was last week," he was saying complainingly.

The old dame was not of a sensitive nature, and despised such aspersions; but she was also one of the few who dared to give the squire "as good as he brought." She was, he knew in his heart, perfectly honest, and it would not have been easy to supply her place, so he was compelled to put up with the freedom of her tongue.

"I can't persuade people to drink the water whether they like or no," she answered, with a glance at Martha (as much as to say, "they are not *my* nieces"). "They must either take it or leave it, and most of them leaves it."

"I don't understand why the average is not kept up," said Mr. Adderly irritably.

"Kep' up! kep' down, you mean," said the old woman in a shrill squeaky voice, that could be

heard a good way off. "Some on 'em finds it very hard to keep it down."

"Hold your tongue, you old fool! there's somebody coming," muttered the squire—"Who are these people, Martha?"

He knew who they were perfectly well. Hetty's spring-couch was known to everybody; he had been on speaking terms with the family for years, though he seldom met them; but it was Mr. Adderly's way to ignore all his neighbours who were not county people.

"They are the Waldrons," replied Martha, dexterously emptying her glass upon the turf; she was not going to be seen for the first time by the new arrival with a wry face. "That is Mr. George, the Indian hero."

"From India, is he?" murmured the squire, taking no notice of the reference to his heroic character, for heroism was out of his line; "then tell him that the Spa is much recommended for the liver."

As an initial observation to a friend whom

Martha had not seen for ten years, the remark itself was hardly to be recommended. The squire, indeed, seemed scarcely to suppose that his commands would be instantaneously obeyed, since he opened relations with the newcomers himself by nodding his head and saying "Good-morning." He had never taken off his hat to a lady in the open air in his life, and it was not to be expected that he would begin committing such extravagances of courtesy in the present case. He did, however, extend two fingers to George Waldron, partly because they had not met for as many years, and partly because he wished by conciliation to get a penny out of him.

The young man took no immediate notice of this sign of amity, but shook hands cordially with Martha Vance. Though she knew that such a compliment paid to her at her uncle's expense would be bitterly resented, she could not help experiencing a certain feeling of gratification. Here was a gentleman at last—and one of the highest class, as she had the good sense to recognise—who appre-

ciated the honour of her acquaintance. He did not mind her being poor and dependent; he did not care a rush for the millionaire, though he was standing by, who owned her for his slave.

"It is a long time since we last met, Miss Vance," he said; "but I think I should have known you anywhere."

"And I you, Mr. Waldron," she answered, and quite truthfully; he was altered, of course, but there was, as his mother had said, something of the boy about him still.

"That is not surprising," he answered, smiling; "for I have not had the chance of growing out of knowledge as you have had." Nevertheless, as he reflected, she had been older than her sister in years, and in character much older; it struck him now that she looked like "an old girl"—a girl, that is, who has much less youth about her than a young woman.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AFFABILITY OF UNCLE ADDERLY.

It may have been taken for granted that, while Mr. George and Martha were exchanging their greetings, the only other gentleman present was doing his best to make himself agreeable to the rest of the party; but this was by no means the case. Perhaps the squire was modest, and, knowing that his "best" was not very attractive, preferred a masterly inaction; for not a word did he say to anybody.

To judge by the earnest look with which he regarded the two speakers, it might, however, have been said of him, as of the reticent parrot, that he thought the more. There was certainly something or other that interested him in their proceedings, which was a compliment of a high kind. Indeed, he was generally so absolutely inattentive to any-

thing that did not concern himself, that one was forced to the conclusion that, somehow or other, the behaviour of this young couple *did* concern him. His ire at the neglect he had suffered from George Waldron seemed to have passed away, and when that gentleman had made an end of his talk with Martha, Mr. Adderly again made signs of amity. Unlike the Sibyl, who, when her MS. was rejected, brought less and less to her editor, so to speak, he now offered the young fellow three fingers instead of two. George looked at them, carefully selected the same number from his own "bunch of fives," and the two men hooked and eyed, for shaking hands you couldn't call it.

It was not the sort of salutation the squire was accustomed to receive in exchange for his own. He looked for something more than reciprocity. It might be free trade, but what the squire had hitherto demanded (and generally obtained) was protection for himself and free trade from everybody else. And still he kept his temper. It might not have been a good thing to do, but (just as, when a

man keeps a savage dog, it is at least to his credit that it is tied up) it was better than letting it go. This effort at conciliation was unprecedented, and astonished all but its object, who did not know the squire's idiosyncrasies. "I warrant 'twill prove an excuse for a glass," murmured Hetty to herself. She thought Mr. Adderly was actuated by the motive which really had animated him in the first instance—George's penny. But he had really another and much more serious reason for being conciliatory.

"I hope you are now coming home to stop, sir, and not to run away again," observed Mr. Adderly. He spoke with a certain pomposity, like a parish teacher reproving a workhouse lad for playing the truant; yet it was somehow plain that his intention was to be urbane.

"I have twelve months' leave, and mean to spend it all in Natchett, if my family will stand it," returned George, smiling.

"I dare say you will be able to make some

pecuniary arrangement with them that will be found mutually convenient," said the squire affably.

Martha pressed her thin lips together till she hardly seemed to have any mouth at all. Both Mrs. Waldron and Maggie turned crimson. There came a very unpleasant look into George's eyes, but Hetty's face was suffused with fun, and the silver laughter that rained from the spring-couch was too infectious for him to resist. Brother and sister broke into quite a duet of mirth, which was prolonged and intensified by the gravity of their companions. Mr. Adderly looked more than grave—exceedingly glum—and, though unconscious of having said anything humorous, he felt that it was he whom they were laughing at. He hated laughter, and hated anything done at his own expense, and here were the two things in combination.

"Well, Miss Hester, *you* must be better," he said acidly, "to laugh like that."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Adderly, I *am* better," returned the invalid sweetly; "the Spa always does me good."

“Well, of course,” answered the squire, much mollified, “its effect is certainly marvellous in many cases.”

“It is more,” she replied with enthusiasm; “for though I never take the water, even the sight of the people taking it exhilarates me.”

“Really?” said Mr. Adderly doubtfully; he was quite ready to believe the young lady’s statement, but had some suspicion of her *bonâ fides*. “Everybody who tries it likes it—that is, I mean,” he added hastily, “benefits by it. Tell Mr. Waldron, Martha, what a blessing it has been to you, and persuade him to try it. As a climacteric it is unrivalled.”

This was a dreadful trial to Martha. She dared not disobey her uncle, yet shrank exceedingly from recommending to Mr. Waldron what she knew to be so very unpleasant. If she could have shaken her head, or given some other sign of warning, she would have done it, but Mr. Adderly was looking at her with some impatience.

"I will take a glass, by all means," exclaimed George good-naturedly; "why not?"

"He *is* a hero," murmured Hetty; "there is no doubt of it. If he takes it without pinching his nose, he is a perfect Paladin."

At a sign from her master, Rebecca dived into the little cellar which was built about the spring, and produced a goblet of the elixir. It was yellow as the Tiber, and had an odour like to that of the Thames at Barking Creek in a hot June.

George shut his eyes and drained the glass; to hesitate he felt was to be lost. Martha looked infinitely grateful, and Hetty clapped her gloved hands applaudingly.

"He is looking round for a spoonful of jam, mamma," she said, "which you always used to give him, poor dear boy!"

"Come, it's not so bad, after all, is it, young gentleman?" exclaimed the squire.

"No; not so bad—as I expected," submitted the victim. "There is nothing else to be done, is there?" he added resignedly.

"There is a penny to pay," observed the squire sententiously—"an absurd price for so remedial an agent. It would be invaluable in a tropical climate. I am thinking of bottling it and sending it to India."

"Oh, do!" exclaimed Hetty with enthusiasm; but I am afraid she meant "send it *all* away."

"It is not altogether unknown there," observed George gravely; "I have read about it in Delhi."

This was very true—in Hetty's letters.

"You don't say so? This is really interesting," remarked the squire. "I would give a liberal commission to any agent who would push the spring."

"It would require an elephant," observed Hetty.

"Why, miss?" inquired the squire sharply.

"Well, I mean for advertising purposes—posters."

"Pooh, pooh! there must be no vulgarity in disposing of a commodity of this kind; it is not like lemonade or ginger-beer."

"That is quite true," said Hetty, with an air of conviction.

"If you should *really* think seriously of the matter, Mr. Waldron," continued the squire, "I should be happy to consider your views. If you will look in at Natchett Hall, any day—after lunch—I shall be glad to see you."

"You are very kind," answered George.

To say that Mr. Adderly *looked* kind would have been an exaggeration; it is difficult to do so without any previous practice; but he was obviously well pleased with his new acquaintance.

"Now the ice has been broken, as it were," he said, with a wintry smile, "you and Martha can come down here every morning and drink the waters together and compare notes."

It was a strange suggestion, but not so strange as it would have seemed to those who heard it, could they have known what the speaker had in his mind.

"How delightful!" cried Hetty ecstatically; then

to herself: "This is funnier than any play;" and though she had never had a chance of witnessing a dramatic performance, it is probable she was right in her assumption.

"I don't think that would quite do, Mr. Adderly," observed Mrs. Waldron drily.

She objected to her George's precious time at home being disposed of by anybody, and especially in the fashion suggested.

"Why not?" inquired the squire with irritation. Then, in a lower and confidential tone: "Let the young people settle matters their own way."

George and Martha were talking together in a low tone, which perhaps Mr. Adderly took for an interchange of tender thoughts.

"I hope, Mr. Waldron," she was saying, "that you will acquit me of having any sympathy whatever with either the Spa or its owner."

"I do indeed. Do you think it possible that I should have so far forgotten you and your sister, and all about you? I had the great pleasure of see-

ing her yesterday, looking, I thought, quite strong and well."

"Yes."

It was a brief enough rejoinder to such a speech, and the tone in which it was spoken, if not absolutely curt, was cold.

"I hope *she* doesn't play tricks with her health in that way," he continued, pointing to the glass which Martha still held in her hand.

"No. Dr. Gray has forbidden her to take the water."

"Thank Heaven and him for that!" returned the young fellow. "You are still at Prospect Cottage, of course?" He was looking at it through the trees with obvious interest. "It is charmingly situated, but the hill must be a disadvantage—I mean to any person in delicate health. To have to climb a hill at the end of a long walk is always fatiguing."

"There are many walks upon the level; that to Hendon Head, for instance."

"But your sister is scarcely equal to such a walk as that, is she?"

"When she has a good day she likes it; Dr. Gray is a great stickler for air and exercise. I must really say a word to dear Maggie, who has been left quite out in the cold."

Mr. George himself was rather in the cold as regarded Martha, but he was quite unaware of it. He could not understand that the subject of her sister could be anything but interesting to her; he perceived that his questions about her had been answered by his companion with a certain reserve; but he attributed it to a disinclination on her part to be reminded of the delicacy of Mary's constitution. This was strange, considering that she was admitted on all hands to be now convalescent.

Maggie, too, asked after Mary; but in her case Martha seemed to find nothing distasteful in her inquiries. Mary seldom came down to the Spa, because the hill, on the return-journey, was so trying a one; but she could do it, and if she had known that Mr. Waldron had been going thither that morning, would probably have accompanied her sister.

If she had done so some serious complications

would certainly have been avoided. But this is not an unusual circumstance in human life. It is the small matters which precipitate the great ones, as the laugh brings down the avalanche. The going out of doors five minutes earlier or later than usual, the turning to the right hand instead of the left, or *vice versa*—these are the things that lead us to fortune or ruin, to life or death. “I have done *nothing*, doctor, nothing rash of any kind,” says the sick man, “to induce this frightful malady.” And that may be true also; sometimes even doing nothing is the worst thing for ourselves we can do.

Mr. Adderly had not *that* imprudence at least to reproach himself with on this particular morning.

He suddenly resolved to take what was for him a most extraordinary step; it was not what many people would have thought much of, but in this case it was a *coup* of the first magnitude.

The Waldrons and his niece were all talking together in a group; George was standing a little apart, but with his eyes on Miss Vance, whose behaviour, as has been said, had somewhat surprised

him. The squire looked at him with a significance which unfortunately was utterly thrown away upon its object, as in a loud voice he exclaimed, "Martha, get into my carriage, and I will drop you at the Cottage, which will save you the walk up the hill."

It is curious what entirely different views people will take of the same thing. This proposition, which seemed to the speaker one of the most courteous and ingratiating of which the human mind could conceive, struck George as rude and dictatorial; whereas the rest of the Waldron family were amazed at its affability, and Martha herself could hardly believe her ears. Her uncle, however, had already scrambled into his vehicle, in his impatient way, and was beckoning to her with the earnestness of a railway signalman. With a good-bye to her friends, so hasty that it did not admit of hand-shaking, she seated herself by Mr. Adderly's side, and was whisked away. Mr. Squeers, in his Sunday clothes, felt, we are told, astonishment at finding himself so respectable; but Martha's sentiments were of a much more

exalted kind. She felt like those mortals we read of in Lempriere, who were snatched up in the chariots of the gods, and didn't quite know what to make of it.

CHAPTER VII.

MARY TAKES HER PLEASURE SADLY.

"THERE!" said Mr. Adderly, in the self-satisfied tone of one who has performed a good action at no slight inconvenience to himself; "I think I have done a good stroke of business for you this morning."

The carriage, though it would not have made any particular sensation in Hyde Park, was a good one; the horses, though their coats might have been sleeker, were a tolerable pair; and, but for the presence of her companion, Martha would have rather enjoyed her drive; but though she knew that an honour had been conferred upon her, she did not see much material advantage in it.

"You are very kind," she answered gently, "to give me a lift, uncle."

"Ah," he put in quickly; "that's the very word.

I always said of you that you knew on which side your bread was buttered. Well, now, it's your own fault if you don't make hay while the sun shines, and in that case I shall wash my hands of you."

This collection—or confusion—of metaphors was snapped out in jerks and starts, to Martha's great bewilderment; nor was their meaning at all assisted by the expression of the speaker, which had lost all its recent affability, and become even more vinegarish and menacing than usual.

"I am very sorry, but I don't quite understand——"

"What!" he interrupted. "Is it possible you can be such an idiot? Come, come! play none of these young-lady tricks on me, miss, for I have not the time for them. This young fellow from India—who hasn't seen ten white women in ten years, I dare say—is evidently struck with you. What he said to himself, however, doubtless was, 'But this girl will not have a penny.' He's quite right, of course; but there is no reason why we should not persuade him to the contrary. What he is saying to

himself *now* is, 'But she has a rich uncle who takes her about in his carriage, and will leave her a pretty sum.' If he is fool enough to think that, let him."

Never in all her life had Martha Vance hated her uncle so intensely as she hated him now, as he poured these coarse and cruel suggestions into her unwilling ear. It was difficult for her, notwithstanding her long apprenticeship to self-restraint, to prevent the loathing she felt for him from expressing itself in looks or words. What moved her most, however, in this brutal plain-speaking, was that she was secretly conscious of there being just a scintilla of truth in it. It was absurd indeed to say that any serious thoughts of Mr. George Waldron as even a possible husband had entered into her mind; women's thoughts do not often advance in such directions with the rapidity assumed by Mr. Adderly; but it was nevertheless true that before Mr. Waldron's arrival Martha had allowed herself to speculate upon what sort of person he was likely to be, with a vague view of the contingency in question. The vicar was already bespoken; or, at all events, Mary

had but to hold up her finger to bespeak him; but the new arrival—the only other eligible male in the place—was understood to be “fancy free”; and the fancy of Miss Martha Vance had wandered, not, indeed, “free,” but in a certain not wholly aimless way, in his direction. When she saw him, it had distinctly taken shape; he had made a favourable impression on her; she had been grateful to him for drinking the Spa water, for her sake; she had been pleased with his manners, attracted by his appearance, flattered by his attentions. The resentment she had felt at his making such particular reference to her sister was indeed proof positive of how favourably she regarded him. But it was one thing to be conscious of all this in her own mind, and quite another to have her scarce half-formed design discovered, or taken for granted by another.

“It seems to me, uncle,” she replied with a forced smile, “leaving my own sentiments out of the question—as, in the case of such an insignificant person as myself, it is only reasonable to do—that you are crediting Mr. Waldron with an idea that has

not so much as entered into his mind. Until to-day he has never set eyes on me."

"Tut, tut, I know all that," broke in the squire impatiently; "you can't marry him to-morrow, of course, though it would save a great deal of trouble and bother if you could. What I want to impress upon you is the necessity, if the idea is not there already, of *putting* it into his mind. He has an excellent salary, and lives a long way off;" here he suddenly reflected that that second circumstance, though an advantage to himself (of whom he was mainly thinking), could hardly be a dazzling prospect for his companion; "though he will not have to live there for ever," he added hastily, "but will retire on a nice pension, with an allowance after death to his wife and children. What a prospect this is for a girl in your position I need hardly say. Why, if the vicar takes Mary, you will both be provided for. Then you will doubtless forget the hand that is now feeding you; but gratitude is a thing I don't look for."

"I, for my part, shall never forget it," said

Martha earnestly. She spoke the truth, but in a different sense from that into which the squire's self-complacency translated it.

If she could have had her way with the "hand" he spoke of, she would have bitten it through, then and there.

"Well, well, fine words butter no parsnips," returned her companion, deceived, but still unmollified; "the proof of the pudding is in the eating; the best way to express your thanks for the generosity I have extended to you is to do what I tell you. Give the fellow every encouragement; hook him, play him, and I'll stand by you with the gaff." Tickled by this unwonted union of wit and metaphor, the squire actually chuckled.

Mary was standing at the parlour window when the carriage drew up at the Cottage, and saw him smile. The two portents—the sight of her sister sitting by her uncle's side and the smile on her uncle's face—were too much for her. She could only stare; the consciousness that her pretty nose

was being flattened against the window-pane alone convinced her that she was not dreaming. What had happened? What *could* have happened? Perhaps Martha had sprained her ankle; that would have accounted for the squire having given her a lift, but scarcely for his smile. No. Martha descended from the vehicle without a limp; and at parting from the squire was dowered with a short, sharp nod, which was his *ne plus ultra* of courtesy to either sister. Then he drove off, and Mary opened the door with eager hands.

“My *dear* Martha! What on earth is the meaning of this?” With a glad surprise in her sweet eyes, she waited for the revelation; there must have been some sort of reconciliation between her uncle and her sister; she had always said that he was not so black as Martha painted him; perhaps he was “coming round” as regarded natural affection, for of material advantage she had no thought.”

“There is no meaning in it,” replied Martha curtly. “It was only a caprice of the old wretch’s; he found me at the Spa and cried ‘Jump in’—I

mean into his carriage, of course—and I did so. *Voilà tout.*”

“But he has never done that before!”

“No, and I hope he never will again. I *know* that some day or other I shall tell him exactly what I think of him.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Mary. Indeed, the menace was an alarming one. “I hope he has not been saying disagreeable things to you.”

“You must be sanguine indeed if you hope that,” said Martha, taking off her bonnet and shawl. Her face was paler even than usual. Her very lips were white.

“There was nothing new, if you mean that,” she went on; “he is a cruel, cowardly, false old man.”

“Surely not false, my dear,” said Mary, in plaintive remonstrance.

“Very good, let us say shameless, then, and have done with him. I have seen the Waldrons.”

Mary’s face flushed up at once with eager interest.

"Indeed? What, all of them?"

"Yes; they were all at the Spa. I quite agree with you that Mr. George is likely to be a great acquisition to Natchett. He was very nice and pleasant, I thought."

"I felt sure that you would like him," said Mary. "He seems so kind and gentle, and—and—natural."

"Well, I have only seen him once, and but for a few minutes," said Martha drily; "but what I did see of him I certainly liked."

The roses on Mary's cheeks became peonies, as though she had had her pretty ears boxed. She felt the tacit reproof that had been administered to her—for had not she, too, only seen George Waldron once, and that but for a few minutes?—and also that it was impossible to defend herself.

"And how was dear Hetty?"

"Very funny, as usual; she shot an arrow or two at Uncle Adderly; but of course they glanced off his rhinoceros hide. What do you say to a walk to Hendon Head? It is a lovely day, and the tide will

serve for the Jut. Let us take our lunch and our sketch-books, and pass the afternoon there."

"There is a good deal of wind, is there not?" answered Mary doubtfully. She was somehow not in favour of the expedition that day, though it was generally a favourite one with her. It was almost certain that the Waldrons would call at the Cottage that afternoon, and she was unwilling to miss them. Martha had seen them already, and could not, of course, feel this; but it was difficult to make use of that argument. Her sister might reply, "Why, you have seen the Waldrons yourself not twenty-four hours ago; why should you be so anxious to see them again?" She might even ask what made her so solicitous about the matter at all, since these friends of theirs lived in the same village, and had been seen every day for years. Whether Martha read her thoughts or not, she certainly regarded her with a strange and rather severe expression.

"There is a wind, of course," she answered contemptuously, "and a north wind, but that does not hurt people in June. Dr. Grey says you can't get

too much air; and the more wind there is the finer the sight will be on the Jut."

"Then by all means let us go," said Mary, with an attempt at enthusiasm. "We are not made of sugar."

To judge by Martha's face, she at least was not made of that material. Though she had got her way, she was by no means pleased with the way it had been got. Sisters who live with one another do not require to be students of human nature to know when an assent to a proposition is genuine or compulsory.

"The sooner we start, the better the tide will serve," she observed drily. "We can take some ham sandwiches in our hand-bags."

Mary ran upstairs to put on her things, but when she reached her room she was not in such a hurry. She spent very little time at the glass, but an unusual amount of it in looking out of the window. The weather, of course, had now become an object of interest to her. It was fine and clear, and the Castle stood up grandly against the blue sky;

The Crag could also be distinctly seen nestling, as it were, under its protection. She wondered whether the Waldrons had gone home. If not, it was possible Hetty might look in upon her before she started for Hendon Head. In that case Martha could hardly insist upon setting out, and if the call was a long one, it would be too late to go. She had no presentiment of evil concerning the proposed expedition, but she had a presentiment of something pleasant if they stopped at home.

These reflections, if they deserved so ambitious a name, were suddenly cut short by her sister's voice from below, inquiring what detained her—a question she would have found some difficulty in answering even to herself. She ran downstairs, and found their extempore meal already prepared, and wrapped up neatly in two white-paper parcels; there were also two flasks containing water, of which for drinking purposes—though there was so much of it otherwise—there was none to be got at the Jut. It was not a luxurious provision, but the sisters had not been accustomed to the cold chicken and cham-

pagne which some people always associate with out-of-door entertainments. There had been times when Mary would have looked forward to the expedition as a great treat; but now it was difficult not to show that she took the pleasure sadly. Her last act as she left the house was to turn her head in the other direction towards the Castle.

“What are you looking for?” inquired Martha sharply.

“The wind,” replied Mary artlessly; “I see it *is* in the north; if it continues to rise there will be a fine sea on, and the waves on the Jut will be splendid.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE APPLICATION FROM AMERICA.

NATCHETT HALL, notwithstanding its name and its considerable size, was scarcely an imposing residence, and certainly not a picturesque one. The line of the poetess, "Ye homes of merry England, how beautiful you be!" could hardly be applied to it; it had not an ancestral air; in fact, but for certain traces of damp upon its stuccoed walls, induced by a hundred storms, and for the inclination of the ornamental trees contemporary with it, caused by the prevailing wind, it might have been built the day before yesterday. Mr. Adderly had been his own architect, which accounted for a good deal; a man who has built up his own fortunes, he had concluded, could surely build his own house—and do it cheaper than if he placed it in professional hands; but the result, from the architectural point of

view, at least, had not been satisfactory. Still, it was unmistakably the home of a rich man. There was plenty of plate-glass about it, and, though the jest about "more carving and less gilding" could not have been applied to its owner, since he gave no entertainments, there *was* gilding. The rooms were spacious; and what were rather superfluously called the reception-rooms were really handsome. They were hung with very large pictures in very large frames; the largest of all was a portrait of the proprietor himself with a book in his hand—the nature of which was a mystery. From what we know of his opinions, it could hardly be a Prayer-book; and it was not likely, however characteristic would have been the touch, that the artist had represented him with a ledger. It was a large volume, and as it could not be taken (so to speak) from life, since there were no books of any kind at the Hall, public opinion pronounced it to be a backgammon board.

What was missing, however, even more than books, at Natchett Hall, were those signs of culture, or at least of refinement, that betoken the presence

of a lady. Though Mr. Adderly had nothing else in common with Smollett's hero, Commodore Trunion's house was hardly more conspicuously deficient in the female element. It was too late in the day to wonder why the squire didn't marry; but, as everybody said, it was amazing that he should let those two nice nieces of his remain cooped up in their cottage, when there was so much room to spare at the Hall, and such evident need for them. In its bareness and discomfort the house was more like some public building, erected for business purposes, than an English home. The dining-room seemed always ready for its board of directors; in the large mirrors of the drawing-room there had never been reflected a vase of flowers or a bit of fancy work. These apartments were rarely used at all, for Mr. Adderly passed most of his time in his "study," where he kept his desk, his account-books, and his slippers.

His servants were few, silent and discreet. They had become so by a process of elimination; all of a buoyant disposition had found the place intolerable,

and left of their own accord, or had been expelled without warning or their month's wages. Those who remained had been more than once rewarded for their fidelity by hearing what the others—preferring the immediate relief of their minds to the problematical compensation the law might subsequently afford them—had said of their master to his face. A butler who had been recommended to him by a county magnate found life so exceedingly different at the Hall from what he had been accustomed to, that he took to drink, and losing all professional reticence in the dark hour of departure, had called the squire “a scaly varmint.” The vagueness of the epithet formed, perhaps, a part of its attraction—it is always difficult to account for the popularity of nicknames—but from henceforth, below stairs, the lord of Natchett Hall was always spoken of by his retainers by that amazing title. It was even more appreciated by those outside the house, who perhaps found a greater appropriateness in it from their familiarity with the “creeping things” of “the garden or the wild,” and when “the scaly one”

or "the varmint" was spoken of in the Parliament of the village ale-house there was no one to cry "Name."

In his presence, however, Mr. Adderly's servants were exceedingly respectful in their manners. He never looked at them, nor at anybody else, when he was speaking to them, but he had a way of turning his eyes suddenly on them when it was least expected (as a policeman turns his bull's-eye), which made any temptation to relaxation (such as putting the tongue out, for example) dangerous in the highest degree. Still, they had their weak moments, which Mr. Adderly never had. Among his many virtues consistency in austerity was pre-eminent. Even when he smiled it gave one the impression that it caused him pain, as if his mouth had been a widening wound.

Nevertheless, as on a winter's day at the Pole there are degrees of frost, the squire was not always quite so cold as he was at other times. When he made a good bargain he sometimes thawed a little.

This was the case with him when he was driving home after that expedition to the Spa we have recorded. He had, indeed, made no actual bargain, but he saw, as he thought, the prospect of making one. He grunted as he lay back in his carriage, as a certain less noble animal is wont to grunt when he hears the clink of the pail that presages food, and nodded to himself in a very complacent manner. His coachman could not see the nod, but he heard the grunt, and recognised the amelioration of his master's mind, and, when Perkins the butler came to the door, closed his left eye to give his fellow-servant notice of the change for the better. If he had closed the right, it would have meant, "Look out for squalls; the scaly one is scaliier than ever." In that case, Perkins would have maintained an inviolable silence; but, as matters were, he ventured to say that there was roast mutton for lunch, and that the servants' dinner-bell had rung. The connection between these facts requires a brief explanation. When Mr. Adderly's servants had a hot joint for dinner—which was by no means always—he in-

variably had a cut of it for his lunch; it saved trouble—and a little money.

“Well, well, put a hot plate over it. I will just look at my letters.”

This was not pleasant for Perkins, since his own dinner would thus be subject to interruption; but he merely said, “Very good, sir,” to his master, and “varmint” to himself.

The squire entered his study hastily—for those were in error who asserted that “he did not care for anything, not even food:” he liked his meat hot—and opened the letter-bag in a trice. There was happily but one letter; but it was one that made him pause. It was addressed in an uneducated hand, with the word “privit” stuck in the left-hand corner, and it bore the New York postmark. Mr. Adderly had few correspondents, and no foreign ones, nor did he recognise the handwriting; yet he guessed who had written this epistle. His gray eyebrows met together, so heavy was his frown, and his mouth became an oval, as though he was about to whistle, which, however, was far from his inten-

tion. For a moment he held the letter in both hands, as though he would have torn it up without reading it; but in the end he read it.

“DEAR MR. ADDERLY,

“I wanted to begin ‘Dear Dick,’ but I thort you mightn’t like it, and that it was better not.” (Perhaps it was better not; but whatever had been written, to judge by the reader’s face, it could scarcely have been worse; its expression was venomous.) “Those days are so long ago when I was ‘your own Nancy’ that you have perhaps almost forgotten them; but I have not. I ain’t a-going to carney you.” (The word implied conciliation, but the look of it had no such effect upon Mr. Adderly; it only provoked an execration.) “I know that nothing as I could say would move you to tenderness, any more than the sight of me, ill and old and broken, could do it. If you spurned me from your door when I was young and pretty (only you had got tired of me), how much more would you do it now! And I ain’t a-going to say anything about

justice or mercy to a man like you; I know you too well." (Here Mr. Adderly smiled—not, indeed, a genial smile, but approvingly. The writer's frankness pleased him.) "Moreover, I acknowledge that I am breaking the agreement as I signed with you when our little one died, and you gave me the money—not much, it wasn't—to come over here. Well, it's gone—almost all of it—and starvation lies before me. You have never known what it is to want a meal, and cannot understand, perhaps, what the fear of coming to such a pass can do with one. Nothing less would have made me write to you, but I must do it. I do not plead for myself, though I might do so, Heaven knows, and *you* know; but you will surely not let the mother of your own child starve. It would take such a very little to keep soul and body together in a poor creature like me, and you could so well spare it. Even if it was to be spent in liquor (as I dare say you think), you might say to yourself, 'I will send it her, for then she will drink herself to death, and be off my hands the quicker.' But any way, though I don't drink

and eat but very little, for Heaven's sake send it. If you don't—— But there, I will not threaten you. There are times when I feel only hopeless, and others when I feel desperate. What is life to me?" ("Yet she wants to live, it seems," snarled the squire to himself.) "What is death to me? At the worst, a place of punishment; and am I not there now? To think that I was once a child—an innocent, happy child—before I became your plaything, makes a madwoman of me. You had better send me something for both our sakes. If it should be but a ten-pound note, I swear I will never trouble you again this side the grave. With that money I could buy some decent clothes and get employment. Unless I do that I must starve.

"NANCY."

Mr. Adderly read the effusion through his gold spectacles, but was nevertheless compelled to hold it pretty close to him by reason of his failing sight; he had had, as we know, other experiences of the fact that nearness is not necessarily dearness; but

he had probably never had anything that he hated so much quite so close to his nose. When he finished its perusal he held the letter out at arm's length, as though it had come from an infected house.

"A lying slut!" was the comment upon it he hissed through his closed teeth. "Ten pounds? no, nor ten pennies!" Again he looked as though he was about to tear the letter up, and again he refrained from it. It struck him at first that he would send no answer; but in that case she might suppose that her communication had miscarried, and might write again. He would put a stop to that, at all events; moreover, he felt that it would be a relief to his pent-up indignation to write a line. It was no sentimental composition that he purposed to himself to send, but it took him some time, nevertheless; he tore up half a dozen notes before he wrote one to his liking; but this was what he finally concluded to send—it was brief enough:

"No, not a penny. You have had all that you will ever get from me."

"The mutton is getting rather cold, sir," observed Perkins; he had rapped twice at the study door without eliciting any reply, and at last had ventured to enter.

It was not the squire's habit to swear at anybody—he preferred to snarl; but on this occasion he indulged himself in a terrific outburst. Mr. Perkins fled incontinently, and immensely increased the hilarity of the dinner-party in the kitchen by the repetition of the oath, and the description of his reception generally. He did not, of course, understand that half the squire's anathema had been provoked by Nancy's letter; a *douceur* had been bestowed upon him which ought by rights to have been shared by another recipient; and the weight and size of the gratuity (considering how little he had done to deserve it) astonished Perkins.

Nevertheless, when in a few minutes the squire rang for his luncheon, he wore his usual air. There was no trace of the tempest of passion that had so lately swept over him—at all events, on the surface. In the depths of the ocean of remembrance the mud

had been stirred up. The sins of our youth are often repented of—more often, perhaps, called to mind with a certain shameless satisfaction; we roll the sweet morsel under our tongue; but neither of these ways was the squire's way. He neither repented nor enjoyed. He was only filled with fury at the thought of this "abandoned woman"—as he actually regarded her, without reflecting who had abandoned her—having had the impudence to appeal to him for money after she had entered into a legal engagement to the contrary. However, he had now settled that matter for good and all. His answer was in the post-bag, and if he was not quite himself again, he looked so.

His thoughts reverted to that scheme of benevolence which had occupied them before Nancy's letter had come—a union between his niece Martha and Mr. George Waldron. It would be an excellent thing for the young woman, and would save him fifty pounds a year. It is curious how one generous action, or even idea, begets another; the plan that had so suddenly entered into his head for the

benefit of Martha now suggested a similar arrangement for Mary. Why should not the Rev. Æneas Harden marry *her*? His thoughts had hitherto not much dwelt upon marrying or giving in marriage; but it was strange that he had not entertained this notion before. He would probably have to provide the trousseau in both cases; but a ten-pound note—the very sum that Nancy had written for—would be ample for that purpose. At present his relations were a little strained with the vicar, because of the matter of the periwinkles on the foreshore; but his claim upon that marine property—though absolute and undeniable—was not worth very much, perhaps twenty shillings a year; if he gave it up in a generous and philanthropic spirit, it would doubtless win the parson's heart, and pave the way for Mary to the altar. He had no doubt that the same method he had already put in practice with George Waldron, and which he felt sure would bear good results, would be equally efficacious with Æneas Harden. In that case he would clear ninety-nine pounds a year. The man was a parson, it is true,

which of itself, in Mr. Adderly's opinion, augured small intelligence; but he couldn't be such a born fool as not to perceive the possible advantage of being connected by marriage with the owner of Natchett Hall. Yes, he would take an opportunity of inviting Mary to take a seat in his carriage some day when the vicar should be a witness of that act of condescension. Then both his nieces would be provided for, and he should save a hundred pounds a year.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JUT.

THE path over the cliff from Natchett to Hendon Head is a noble one, and the spirit must be depressed indeed which the views from it fail to please. When the mind is melancholy, the effects of inland beauty are rather apt to minister to its sombre mood; but the fresh air of the sea upon the cliff-top is almost always invigorating. Mary Vance found it to be so, when once she had started with her sister upon their expedition. Had she looked back, the sight of the Castle might have suggested the friendly roof that lay beneath it, and revived the cause of her regret; but she had had enough of looking back. Martha's tone, when she had inquired what she was looking for, had been unmistakably sharp, and she herself had a secret consciousness that she deserved it. Her eyes were now

directed seawards, to the red-sailed fishing smacks, all homeward bound in anticipation of rough weather, though there was scarcely a cloud on the horizon, and to the colliers, which, under steam, little heeded the "spite of wind or tide"; and now forwards to the majestic head, with the long ridge of rock projecting from its base, on which, even at so great a distance, and with the rising gale in the opposite quarter, they could already hear the beat of the ceaseless waves. Above them the shrieking gulls were "blown about the sky" like snowflakes.

"We shall be hardly able to hold our sketch-books on the Jut to-day," said Mary.

"Oh yes, we shall; I know of a big rock with seats of stone beneath it, where we shall be in shelter," answered Martha. She was speaking the truth, no doubt; but in any case, since she had proposed the Jut as the object of their walk, she would have gone there; her disposition was masterful, and when she had once made up her mind to anything it was difficult to move her. When thwarted, she resented it bitterly; no one except her uncle—and

his doing so was no small factor in the sum of her dislike of him—ever did thwart her. Mary always gave in to the least opposition, which explained what was rather a matter of surprise to some of their friends—how well the two sisters “got on” together.

Walking in the direction they were going was difficult. The wind, which was at their backs, was so powerful that it almost compelled them to run, and when they reached Hendon Head it was not easy to keep their feet. The Bloomer costume would have been a great advantage to the young ladies, nor could it have been objected to in their case upon the ground of disclosing more of the human form. But, fortunately, there were no spectators. Natchett was a couple of miles away on one side of the Head, and on the other was Hendon Bay with its single cottage. Its inmate, a fisherman, was within doors, and his boat, moored to the shore, was rocking on the little waves like a cradle. For the Head and the Jut between them sheltered the bay from the north so completely that the sea

to right and left presented the most curious contrast: on the one side the waves were lashed to fury; on the other they leapt and laughed in the sun, like children at play. But the thunder of the surf against the Jut overhung them both and drowned the roar even of the wind.

“How glad I am we came!” exclaimed Martha at the top of her voice (any ordinary mode of speech would have been useless). “What a magnificent spectacle!”

Poor Mary, who had no breath to spare, and who was secretly in some alarm at the gigantic “effects,” regardless of expense, Nature was producing, only nodded her little head in assent; she was thinking of the steep path that led down to the Jut, where, though they would be partially protected from the gale—for gale it was by this time—their footing would be less secure. Perhaps Martha had thought of it too, and passed that eulogy on the scenery to anticipate opposition and any weak proposal to turn back. It was really a nasty place to get down in such weather, especially with their

sketch-books and sandwich bags; for though the Misses Vance had been likened to fawns, they had nothing in common with the chamois. They had to use their hands almost as much as their feet. At the bottom there was a narrow but deep gully, at present quite dry, and tolerably sheltered by great rocks.

"Don't you think it will be better to stop here, dear?" said Mary nervously.

"Here? Why, how is one to sketch?" inquired Martha imperiously. It is fair to say that she had helped her weaker sister down the cliff, and therefore, perhaps, felt in a position to exert her authority. "We might as well sit in a ditch. We must get on to the Jut, of course. What can you be thinking about?"

"I was thinking of Pharaoh and all his host being engulfed in the Red Sea," answered Mary; "this is just the kind of place that the Egyptians——"

"Rubbish!" ejaculated Martha, cutting short the

historical parallel. "Here, give me your hand, and then follow me."

She climbed up the rocky wall on to the Jut, and pulled her sister after her, and then led the way under the huge boulders, which afforded them some shelter, to the great hollowed rock she had in view. It was really a very pleasant spot to sit in, and well protected from wind and spray. Behind them the waves raged and roared; before them lay the sparkling bay, with its one house or hut, ready to be transferred to paper.

"This is capital!" cried Martha, seating herself on a flat stone, and producing her sketching materials. "Perhaps you will trust to me another time."

The observation was characteristic, for Mary had not uttered a word that implied want of faith; but for opposition, even of a negative kind, her sister had a keen eye, and she had detected signs of at least unwillingness in the other's manner.

"What on earth are you looking at your watch for?" she added hastily.

"Only to know how long we shall have in this delightful spot," returned Mary, with a show of enthusiasm.

"Oh, hours!" replied Martha, in a mollified tone. "You needn't fidget about that. The tide has only just turned. We could have three hours for sketching; but since I see you are as nervous as a kitten, we will only take two."

"There's a dear," said Mary, much relieved. "Do not let us run any risk. I confess I'm a dreadful coward."

"Well, don't confess it to anybody else. I should be sorry for Mr. George Waldron, for example, to think that my sister was a coward."

"Why?" inquired Mary quickly—for her, indeed, almost sharply. The other's remark had grated upon her. What could it signify to Martha, was the question that occurred to her, what sort of opinion Mr. Waldron entertained of her?

"Well, only that he is so very heroic," answered Martha, with an uncomfortable laugh.

"The very last man in the world, nevertheless, I

should think, not to make allowances for a woman's weakness," was Mary's rejoinder.

"That is fortunate, for with such a reputation as he brings home with him, no doubt he will find women very weak. What you say, however, is true, Mary. He is really a fine fellow; so modest and unassuming, too. I like him."

Mary busied herself with her sketch-book, and answered nothing. Her sister's words at first had frightened her, because they had seemed to impute the weakness they spoke of to herself; relieved from that impression, it then struck her that they had a certain air of proprietorship in the person they eulogized. It was natural enough, indeed, that her sister (or anyone else) should praise him; even the phrase "I like him" might, in the mouth of another girl, have had no particular significance; but Martha was not given to such confessions. To Mary's ears it almost amounted to a claim. "Notice. This eligible young gentleman is my private property. Trespassers beware. Signed, Martha Vance, spinster." A most unwarranted and illegal pretension, of

course, but one which filled her with vague alarm. What was ominous, and a proof of the strong impression that George Waldron had made upon her, she was unconscious of anything unnatural in this state of feeling as regarded herself. She took it as a matter of course. She did not think it strange that she should be jealous of Martha, or apprehensive of her rivalry. It even suddenly struck her that her sister might have proposed their present expedition to prevent her seeing George when he called at the Cottage that afternoon, which she felt sure he would do. She had always succumbed to Martha, without even a struggle; but there were some things—or, at all events, one thing—which she would not put up with. She felt indignant and rebellious—no, not rebellious, for this was a matter in which Martha could claim no authority.

Her silence did not seem to embarrass her sister, who on her part, too, was apparently disinclined for conversation. Paint-brush in hand, she was looking thoughtfully at Hendon Bay, but without transferring its beauties to her sketch-book. Her last words had

been "I like him." What was she thinking about? Mary wondered.

Presently they both began to paint, exchanging a word or two now and then upon the subject of their work. The amateur is, in one respect at least, on a level with a professional artist—that if he takes interest in his task, it enthral him. There is no recipe for passing time, as regards quickness, like painting a picture, except, perhaps, writing a story. While one is at it, the enemy flies, and one takes no notice. The two girls were conscious, of course, that the hungry waves were leaping up behind them; but they were well accustomed to the "dreadful diapason of the sea," and though its thunder was louder than they had ever heard it, it had no disturbing effect. They had often been on the Jut before, and knew its ways. Suddenly, however, something seemed to strike the very rock itself that sheltered them, and a shower of spray fell upon Mary's sketch-book.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "is that the tide?"
Martha turned pale and drew out her watch.

"We have stayed longer than I intended," she said, a little hastily; "but we have still a good half-hour to spare!"

"We have not half a minute!" cried Mary wildly. She had climbed up the rock, and looked behind them so far as the blinding spray permitted her to look. The Jut was almost covered by the waves. The occupation in which they had been engaged, or perhaps their reflections on another theme, had prevented them from noticing that the tide, with the wind's help, was coming in much more quickly than usual. The rock had been their shelter, indeed, but a most treacherous one, and was only too likely to prove their gravestone.

Hand in hand—for to stand alone, much more to move, in the face of the gale that was now blowing, was almost impossible—the two girls threaded their way, as quickly as they could, among the great boulders; but they now found themselves opposed by another element: the spray was blown in blinding sheets, and where the way had before been dry there were already great pools—not as yet the off-

spring of the incoming tide, but water torn from the tops of the waves—through which they had to wade. It was difficult to see before them through the flying foam; but they pressed onward with desperate haste towards the Head, the summit of which was a landmark that could not be mistaken. The question which each put to herself was, Was the gully between it and them still passable? But in their sinking hearts they knew that it was not. The tide was wont to sweep through it like a millrace, long before it reached the rocks they were now passing, and which were already half surrounded by the sea. The prospect—literally the prospect—before them was terrible. All the features of it, which, had they been in safety, two hundred yards at most to the westward, would have caused their admiration, had assumed a menacing and abhorrent air. Nature had become terrible to them, for she was hungry for their lives. The threatening thunder of the surf; the malignant hiss of the wave as it drew back to gather volume for another onslaught; the blue sky that smiled so contemptuously upon their pitiful

case—these were never afterwards forgotten, nor, as it were, forgiven. “Nature is all very charming,” Martha used afterwards to say when exhorted to admire scenery, “but not when she wants to kill you.”

What appalled the poor girls most, however, was their utter loneliness; the sight of a fellow-creature upon Hendon Head, even though it could have been of no possible help to them, would have given them spirit. The absence of all human sympathy paralyzed their energies. As they drew near to the end of the Jut, their worst fears became realized. They could hear the rush of the incoming stream rising above the general roar of the waves; they could even see the wild water above the rocky walls of the gully, proclaiming that it was full; but at the same time they saw something else: a dripping form emerge from the gully itself, and run gesticulating towards them.

“Back, back,” it cried, “for your lives! The tide is in; make for the higher ground.”

CHAPTER X.

A RUN FOR LIFE.

THE girls turned at once and obeyed the man.

Whoever it was who had thus swum or waded through the flood to their aid would have earned the right of being obeyed. But though he looked little like himself, bare-headed, his hair tousled by the wind, dripping wet from head to foot, and, above all, with a terror in his face they had never thought to see there, they both recognised him at a glance.

“What other man in the world,” thought Mary, “at such a supreme moment, could possibly have stepped in between them and death except George Waldron?”

He led the way, or rather pressed them on, giving his assistance now to one and now to the other, to the rock from which they had started, and

almost without a word. They placed themselves unquestioningly in his hands, feeling that he would do what was best, though his course of action was unintelligible to them. Why were they going over the same ground again, and in the direction opposite to that in which safety lay, while every moment was so valuable to them? Yet, even if it was lost time, they were conscious that without his help they could not have stood against the wind or sea, far less have retraced their steps without the occasional assistance of his powerful arm. The gale was at its height, and not only the foam of the waves, but huge portions of the waves themselves were flung at them. Mary would have fallen more than once if the young fellow had not been close beside her; in some places where the pools were deep he even lifted her up and carried her a few paces. Then he would return and hold out his hand to her struggling sister. To both of them his doing this seemed the most natural thing in the world. Death was beckoning them too nearly and too impatiently to admit of their noting these de-

partures from the rules of convention, and yet, so far as Mary, at least, was concerned, the experience was not one of unmixed apprehension. She had the fullest confidence in this man, who had shown such courage and conduct in scenes no less terrible than the present. The sound of his voice, though it uttered but words of warning, was pleasant to her; the clasp of his hand not only gave her courage, but a vague delight.

They were once more in the hollow of the rock they had quitted only a few minutes before; their sketch-books lay where they had left them, and so complete was the shelter it afforded, even a torn leaf from one of them remained by its side, though it had not escaped the spray.

"You must remain here till I come for you," said the young man earnestly. "Whatever happens, do not be frightened; you will, at all events, be safer here than anywhere."

"You are surely not going to leave us, Mr. Waldron?" exclaimed Martha reproachfully. His

company had rallied her strength and spirits, as in her sister's case, but she had not the same unreasoning confidence in him. To lose him seemed to lose all.

"I am not going to desert you," he answered gently, "if that is what you mean, Miss Martha; but leave you I must; there is nothing left but to swim for it."

"And we cannot swim," exclaimed Martha. The young fellow looked at Mary and lifted his eyebrows.

"He is going for the boat, Martha," she answered for him.

"Yes, that is our only chance," he said, rewarding his partisan with a smile. "I shall keep my sand-shoes on, so that when I reach the shore I can run along the rocks; you will be able to watch me the whole way, and you will see that I shall run faster than the tide."

In an instant he had thrown off coat and waist-

coat and plunged into the bay; it was still comparatively calm, for none of the waves from the north side of the Jut had as yet mingled with it; and it would not have been difficult for him to have reached the fisherman's hut by swimming; but time was now everything, and five minutes either way would mean life or death. Indeed, though nothing he had done had been done in a hurry or without forethought, he had not, in fact, wasted a moment. The history of his presence on the Jut is easily explained. He had called at the Cottage, as Mary's heart had presaged, and was told whither the young ladies had gone, and needing, as he said to himself, a walk after a pretty hearty luncheon, he thought he would take the same excursion.

It had been one very familiar to him of old, and the place was not given to change; in spite of the terrible assaults of wind and tide, the rocky promontory, save for the shifting of the boulders, was much the same as when, years ago, he had swept its glassy pools, fringed with seaweed, with his prawn-net. His boyish mind had eagerly welcomed

and retained all the fishermen had told him of the Jut. He knew what ships had gone to pieces upon it; what adventurous persons had been caught by the tide and drowned there; and all its incidents and peculiarities. As he noticed the rising force of the gale, it also struck him that the tide would rise before it more rapidly than under ordinary circumstances, and that for this the young ladies might not make sufficient allowance. His mind had been already occupied with them, or with one of them, more or less, throughout his walk, and this hint of danger caused them to monopolize it.

If they had not already reached the gully that lay beneath the mainland and the Jut it would be difficult for them to do so without assistance. This thought, though he was already walking quickly, made him quicken his steps. From the top of the Head he could see their slanting figures making their slow way against the wind; it was just possible, not indeed that they would be in time to pass the gully dryshod, but that with his help they might be enabled to wade through it; and with this end in

view he had dashed down the steep path, to find, as we have seen, that their retreat was already cut off. He could make his way, though by no means easily, to them; but it was impossible that they could come to him. And then it would have been better, and saved priceless time, if he started for the boat of which he was now in quest at once; he dared not, however, leave the girls to retrace their steps upon the Jut, on which every sea, where it was unprotected by the great boulders, was now breaking with frightful violence; nor, indeed, by reason of the roar of the stream, could he have given them the requisite advice from the other side of it.

What he had now to do was to swim to the nearest landing-place in Hendon Bay beyond the gully, and then make his way along the shore to where the boat was lying. This last he did at full speed, at the same time waving his wide-awake in his hand to attract the attention of the fisherman. The two girls whose lives were dependent upon his quickness of foot were, as he had told them would be the case, the witnesses of his endeavours for

their rescue; he had purposely informed them of the fact with a definite object. He knew that the ordeal before them was of the severest kind—that of suspense—and he wished to fix their attention on the brightest side of the picture. When danger is thundering at our doors, it is comfort indeed to know that rescue is on the road; and the sisters were so placed that, if it only came in time, they would see it coming.

At present, however, that prospect was far from encouraging. They saw the young fellow breast the waves and reach the shore with a speed that only a skilled swimmer could have used; but, like all proceedings in the water to those who watch them from the shore, his movements seemed slow and tedious. Had it been low tide, he would have then had the level sand to run upon; but this was now covered by the waves, and he had to make his way as best he could along the slippery rocks and seaweed. Never was a case so urgent to which, at the same time, the proverb "More haste less speed" was so applicable, since a false step might mean a

sprained ankle, and a sprained ankle would certainly have involved the loss of two lives.

The sisters sat side by side, watching the scene with an interest of which the mere playgoer can form no estimate, since the result of the drama concerned not so much the *dramatis persona* as themselves.

"How slowly he runs!" murmured Martha complainingly.

"He only looks to do so, because he is already so far off," said Mary. "It is so hard to keep one's footing upon those wet green stones. I am sure he is doing his very best for us."

"Let us hope so. Still, *he* is safe enough, whatever happens. I think it would have been more manly in him not to have left us."

"Martha, for shame!" cried her sister vehemently. "But for Mr. Waldron we should both have been drowned by this time. For my part, at all events, I could not have made my way back here against the

wind and sea. What good could he have done by staying here? Does not our only hope lie, as he explained to us, in the boat yonder coming to fetch us off in time?"

Novelists and others often tell us that there is an instinct which informs even the soundest sleeper when any individual intrudes upon his privacy—"the mysterious consciousness that we are not alone"—but against this great convenience must be set the obstinate stupidity with which people in country places ignore all attempts of their fellow-creatures to gain their attention. If the cabman kept no brighter look-out about him than the bumpkin, or the boatman (on land), his fares would be few indeed.

To Roger Leeson, the only dweller in Hendon Bay, the feats of wind and wave, however majestic, were nothing new, and, so long as he and his boat were out of reach of their malice, had no sort of interest for him. He knew that folks came from Natchett, and even farther, to see the white water cover the Jut on stormy days, and the knowledge of

it increased his self-respect. It was a proof of the mental inferiority of landmen and landswomen to seafaring folk, who were attracted by no such cheap and common exhibitions, but devoted themselves when at leisure to tobacco and philosophic reflection. These visitors were often inlanders, and made "a mort o' noise, only the roar of the waves drowned it." As Roger left his net-mending for a moment and came to his door to look at the weather, he noticed one of those very visitors, "jumping and capering with his hat off" (as he afterwards described the incident) "as though no one but himself had ever seen the tide come through the gully, and the foam start out at the blow-hole."

If he wanted ginger-beer Roger could supply him with it, for he kept a stock of that luxury for that express purpose, and it was probable that so much jumping and shouting would cause the gentleman to feel dry, which would be the better for trade. If he expected Roger Leeson to take the ginger-beer to *him*, as some did, at twopence a bottle, without some extra charge for carriage, he

did not know Roger, and was never more mistaken in his life. However, the young fellow was a good 'un to run, at all events, for Roger well knew those slippery stones; only why should he be coming *away* from the Jut, just as all the fun (as most land-lubbers thought it) was at its height, instead of staying to watch it? Was it possible—— Here Roger snatched up his telescope (the only article besides the ginger-beer he dealt in, and loaned to visitors at “a penny a squint”), and took a long and steady glance at the Jut itself. Then he rushed at his boat and addressed his head and shoulders to the task of launching it through the wet sand with an energy he had never before expended. It moved but slowly, and just as he had got it to the water's edge, the stranger whose movements he had been watching with such contemptuous indifference came up to him, still at full speed, but with labouring chest.

There was no contempt in Roger's countenance now as he held up his horny hand for silence, but, on the contrary, a keen admiration.

“Don’t waste another ounce of breath,” he exclaimed, “but jump in. I know what the matter is well enough without your telling, and would to Heaven I had known it five minutes earlier! You’re a good plucked one if ever there was one, but you must take the tiller. We shall do it quicker that way, until you get your wind again. You see yonder big stone upon the Jut—steer straight for it.”

This speech was full of wisdom; Waldron had pointed, panting, to one of the oars, but the demand he had already made upon his breath and strength rendered him for the present in that respect a useless ally. The task now given him he could perform, while at the same time it permitted him to recover himself. His exertions had been prodigious. His breath came in great sobs, and the veins in his forehead stood out like whip-cord; but there was a passionate anxiety and terror in his eyes, which appealed still more to the sympathy of his companion.

“Don’t trouble to open your lips, my lad,” he said, as he threw his full strength into the oars;

“but just move your head for ‘yes’ and ‘no’ while I ask you a question or two. There are only two of them—with petticoats—so far as I could make out, in peril of their lives yonder: is that so? Good! the fewer the better. Before,” continued Roger, with a glance at the other’s garments, “you took to the water, did you not tell them to stay under the Big Stone till they were fetched, whatever happened? Well, of course you did, like a man of sense. Then, please God, we shall find them there.”

The boat, considering its size, progressed with rapidity in answer to Roger’s powerful strokes, till the roar of the surf sounded like those peals of thunder of which we say, “It is breaking over our heads.”

“Are you steering right for the Stone?” inquired Roger presently, at the top of his voice.

“I was a moment ago,” replied Waldron, in agonized tones; “but now I can see nothing but surf and sea.”

"Then keep her head straight, and hold on," said Roger, and in two strokes the boat grounded on the Jut, amid a shower of foam and spray which hid all things from their eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

SAVED.

It is said, and truly, that the being brought face to face with death—even in the case of one not dear to us, and much more, of course, when the sense of impending loss is added to other dread reflections—is the most serious impression of which human life is capable. Even the sick-room, to one unused to sickness, and who is introduced to its surroundings for the first time, is an experience not easily forgotten. The gulf between rich and poor is broad and deep enough, but it can be bridged over by successful energy, some fortunate accident, or the scrape of a pen; and in a few weeks or months he who has passed over it forgets that he has done so; it seems to him that he has always been, so to speak, on the safe side. Health and disease stand much more widely apart from one an-

other. The habitual invalid dwells in another world from that of his more fortunate fellow-creatures, and when they visit him for the first time, they become for the first time aware of it. When the sick-room is the chamber of death, this difference is still more accentuated for us. We feel as we never felt before, and will never feel again till it comes to our own turn to die. When that happens, life wears a different aspect indeed for us, yet one that, except in rare cases, we have been more or less prepared for. The usual method of meeting with "the shadow feared of man" is like the coming nearer and nearer up a long straight road of an acquaintance whose features gradually become familiar to us before he takes us by the hand. But sometimes we meet Death literally face to face, upon a sudden, and when, as the phrase goes, he is "the last person we should have dreamt of meeting." This was the experience that now presented itself to Martha and Mary Vance.

They had, however, a little while to wait, which, brief as it was, appeared protracted, as time does

in which events, or even emotions, are closely packed. To the younger her fate seemed sad and strange, to the elder cruel; but in neither was there any of that panic terror which, under like circumstances, sometimes overwhelms both man and woman, as though death were some punishment they have deserved. The reflection that she was the cause of their common calamity—that the expedition had been her own proposal, and that she had despised her sister's apprehensions about venturing upon the Jut at all—more than once forced itself upon Martha's mind, but she resolutely, almost defiantly, put it aside; she could not bring herself to say, "It was my wilfulness, dear Mary, that has brought us to this pass." It would only have given Mary pain, had she done so; but it was not the knowledge of that fact which kept her silent. She was angry with herself, but still more bitter against the severity of the penalty which her masterfulness had incurred. While there was hope of rescue, while it seemed possible that George Waldron could attract in time the attention of the boatman, the two sisters, with

hand clasped in hand, conversed with one another in subdued tones, which their proximity, and the shelter still afforded them by the rock beneath which they sat, permitted them to do, notwithstanding the thunder of the rising tide; but as the waters gathered about them, and the figure so slowly nearing the fisherman's hut seemed incapable of attracting his attention, they gave themselves up for lost, and spoke no more. Once, indeed, through the clouds of spray which now began to obscure their vision, Mary thought she saw the boat upon its way.

"He is coming!" she exclaimed, with feverish joy; but even as she spoke a creamy wave overtopped, for the first time, their sheltering rock, and, as it drenched them to the skin, seemed to thunder, "He comes too late!" The water, though as yet to no great depth, had already swirled in between them and the bay; and huddled together in a hollow of the Giant Stone, as it was called, they awaited their doom. They were neither of them, as the phrase goes, wanting in devotion, but with the elder sister's prayers mingled (as happens, doubtless, to most of

us in our last moments) many mundane thoughts; it is but natural in one still of this world, though only for so brief a span, since we have hitherto dwelt in no other; she had even noted that her sister had said, "He is coming," instead of "The boat is coming." True, such things mattered not now, but still she noted it. She even reflected—if a flash of thought can be called reflection—that the fate of herself and sister would relieve Uncle Adderly of a pecuniary burthen, and be a distinct satisfaction to him; but mostly she thought of those she liked, and pictured how they would miss her. As for Mary, who was about to be her companion to the land of shadows, she seemed, as she embraced her, to be part of herself, and excluded from the category of survivors; in death, it would indeed be said of them that they were not divided. Mary, too, though her mind was cast in a more religious mould, was not so overwhelmed by the contemplation of the mysterious and appalling change that was awaiting her but that something of earth still touched it.

"How sorry he will be, poor fellow," she once murmured softly to herself, "that, though he did his best, it was unavailing!"

What did Nature care—the Nature we are so fond of eulogizing in our arm-chairs—for those poor helpless girls? The wind lashed their pale faces, and seemed to triumph over their dumb despair; the waves, like ten thousand devils, leapt at them with hungry cries, and climbed and swirled and screamed for their defenceless prey. Above them was already spread a winding-sheet of spray and foam, which hid them from all eyes, and had caused George Waldron to exclaim, "I cannot see where the Big Stone stands!"

Nor could he; but Roger Leeson knew, though he could not see, and that beneath it lay the only stretch, or rather slip, of sand, free from huge jagged rocks and possible for a boat to land at, on all the Jut. To have missed it by half a foot would have been shipwreck, but the brave barque *Emma Jane* (of Hendon), true to her tiller, and urged by his strong arms, kept right on, and missed it not,

but buried her bow in the wet sand so deep that she was for the moment anchored.

And thus it happened that Martha, being nearest to the waters of the bay, was suddenly snatched up and carried by she knew not whom, save that it was not the pale messenger she had expected, and placed in Waldron's arms. He took her gently but mechanically, and with wild eyes cried out something, to which Roger replied roughly, "Bide where you are;" and in a trice he had brought out Mary and placed her by her sister's side, and the boat was off, with a foot of water in her, but without leaving her bones, as many a finer craft had done before her, upon Hendon Jut.

The two poor girls were still in evil case; wet, white, and almost inanimate, they sat propped up by cushions (for the *Emma Jane* was, on occasion, a pleasure-boat) in the stern; but they were conscious of their preservation, and murmured forth their thanks to God and man.

"Don't you trouble to talk, ladies," said Roger, taking off his pea-jacket and laying it carefully over

them. "There will be time for that when we have got you within doors and given you a sup of whisky."

Waldron had not even a jacket to offer them, and feeling, though his heart was full of tenderness and pity for them, that the fisherman's advice was good, addressed his conversation, as he steered, to Roger only.

"You are a right good fellow," he said earnestly; "and both these ladies are well aware that they owe their lives to you."

"Tut, tut! my boat and me would never have been nigh them in time, but for your running and hollering; I never seed a man make his way among they boulders as you did; it was touch and go, however, even as it was, that's the truth. 'Twas lucky as I know my way almost in the dark about the Big Stone; he's gone, you see, now, tall as he is, along with the rest of them."

He nodded as he spoke towards the Jut, and Waldron turned to look at it; the girls, too, though it cost them an effort, glanced back at the scene of

their late peril with awestruck eyes. Not one of all those thousand rocks, not an inch of foothold for man or beast, was visible; the whole promontory was now a mass of yeasty waves, which, passing over the rocky barrier, roused the calm waters of the bay to tumult. Between the boat and the shore, however, the sea was scarcely rougher than before, and the *Emma Jane* soon accomplished her voyage. Though wet and shivering, the two sisters had by that time almost recovered themselves, and were able to walk to the hut without assistance. Unhappily, as Roger had no wife, there were no dry clothes for them, nor was there any fire. Waldron felt that it would be wiser for them, even in the teeth of the wind which was still raging, to push on to Natchett, than to wait, in their dripping garments, till a vehicle could be sent for them.

To this they assented, asserting, as women do when about to run a risk, that "they were sure it would not hurt them," and dropping some words of pity for their companion, who was as wet as themselves, and had neither coat nor waistcoat.

"I am used to wear still less in India," he answered laughingly; "and my clothes I gladly leave to Neptune in acknowledgment of our preservation; but I regret for Roger's sake"—the fisherman had gone into some inner room to fetch the whisky—"that with my coat I have lost my note-case, so that I can make no immediate return to him for his good services to us. Let us hope he will credit us with good intentions."

"Here is your note-case," said Mary shyly, "and also your watch and chain, the loss of which you omitted to mention. It was not a pretty thing to do, but I rifled your pockets."

"It was a very wise and thoughtful thing to do," returned the young man earnestly. "There are very few people who, when their own lives are in peril, would concern themselves about the property of others. There must have seemed very little hope at one time of your having the opportunity of returning it to me."

"There seemed to be none, but still there was a chance that you might get it," said Mary simply.

He looked at her with admiration mingled with distress. It horrified him, unselfish as the act had been, that she should have looked such a contingency in the face as the recovery of these things from her dead body. Martha kept silence; it struck her that her sister must have used a good deal of secrecy in rifling (as she had called it) George Waldron's pockets. She, too, thought it strange that such an idea should have entered her sister's mind, but also significant.

"Now, ladies, here is the whisky!" exclaimed Roger, entering with bottle and glass. "A sup of it will do you all the good in the world."

This is a eulogium often passed on that spirit (famed for its neatness). For my part, I think it ought to do one good, upon the same principle which leads us to expect virtue in an ugly woman.

Neither Martha nor Mary had ever tasted anything so filthy in their lives; but as this prescription of Dr. Roger Leeson was backed by the advice of Mr. George Waldron (called in in consultation), there was nothing for it but to swallow the dose.

"If you would come with us, and help the ladies to get along against the wind, Roger, it would be a good plan, I think," suggested George, at starting.

"Most certainly, sir. I'd carry 'em pick-a-back with a willing heart, if it were thirty miles instead of three."

An observation partly dictated, no doubt, by natural chivalry, but also by the transference of something out of George Waldron's note-case to his own pocket—an acknowledgment in black and white of the great service he had rendered the young ladies, and very appropriately ornamented with a watermark.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENRAGED PHYSICIAN.

THE ease with which some men and women accommodate themselves to a change of fortune—if it be for the better—is very remarkable; and it is accompanied by so brief a thankfulness as may well provoke the anger of the gods. To say that the gratitude of Martha Vance had evaporated before her garments had dried would have been paying it a much higher compliment than it deserved, for they were not dry when she took them off, and in that long and disagreeable walk home her mind was already occupied by quite other matters than her recent preservation. She had the advantage of the assistance of Roger Leeson's stalwart arm, but even for that, I fear, she was not thankful. She was thinking mainly of the other couple, progressing behind her with more difficulty, but with a greater

mutual satisfaction. There were subsequent events in Martha's life which threw a doubt upon the suggestion that she had ever entertained any serious thoughts of winning the affections of George Waldron; she had seen him, as we know, but once since his boyhood, and her nature was hardly one of those that permits itself the dangerous luxury of love at first sight; her feelings had certainly received no crushing blow, but her *amour-propre* had as certainly been wounded. It had but very vaguely entered her mind that if she could persuade Mary to marry the vicar, and could secure George Waldron for herself, it would be a very convenient arrangement for all parties, but it *had* entered it; and when she had planned out anything, however roughly, she resented its failure. She had the sagacity, however, to know when she had failed, and in the present case she was thoroughly convinced of it.

Mary had unconsciously revealed her secret to her, when they were passing what they believed to be their last hours on earth upon Hendon Jut; but it was possible that even that circumstance would

not have prevented Martha from pursuing her object; if she had happened to have thought of securing the young fellow's valuables, instead of her sister—a practical idea which ought by rights to have occurred to her—she would have fought with her for the prize of the man himself; but Mary's forethought had, of course, given her an immense advantage; moreover—which really settled the question—it was clear to Martha, from George Waldron's manner, that he preferred her sister to herself. Nothing could be kinder than the solicitude he showed upon her own account; but, still, there was a tenderness in his behaviour towards Mary the significance of which no woman could fail to see. Of course Mary had had great luck as regarded precipitating matters; that hour on Hendon Jut had been equal to a month of the opportunities of love-making such as ordinary life afforded; but, at all events, it had been accomplished—the thing was done. Martha Vance acknowledged it to herself without so much as a sigh—she was much too sensible a young woman to cry over spilt milk; but for all that she did not like

Mr. George Waldron so well as she had done a couple of hours ago. If she had been inclined to think of him too tenderly, it was only right and proper that this change should have occurred; but we have no proof that she had so thought of him—the fact is simply recorded because it was destined to have a serious influence upon more than one character in our story. Whether it was a case of the grapes being sour or not, she certainly from this time began to entertain a much less high opinion of the young man than she had done. This change in her relations to him caused her to regard her Uncle Adderly with a greater detestation than ever; she had much disliked his vulgar attempt that morning to throw her at George Waldron's head, but the idea of having to tell him (as she must sooner or later do) that George had chosen her sister, instead of herself, was a reflection so bitter and humiliating that it seemed to turn her blood to gall.

Gratitude for her preservation was no longer, as has been said, in Martha's mind; but even if the subject had been brought to her notice, it is possible

that she might have defended herself upon the ground that she had not so very much to be thankful for after all.

With Mary, on the other hand, the case was wholly different. She was as grateful for the mercy that had been vouchsafed to her as she had been an hour or so ago, when, in the humid darkness, an unknown arm had been thrown around her and had borne her away to light and life. Nay, the life she had regained seemed now even more worth the living to her than it had done when she was on the very verge of quitting it. She was wet; she was weary; her limbs could scarcely carry her fragile body upon its homeward way; but she was intensely happy. Love had suddenly beautified her life, and rendered it precious to her. It had mingled with it before, but almost unconsciously, and without reasonable justification; but now it had received recognition, and not only from herself. Though not a word had been spoken of it, she felt in every fibre of her frame that it was reciprocated by the beloved object. In the tone of his voice, in the glance of his eye,

in the gentle pressure of the strong arm that was helping her on her way, and even in his silence, she read that George Waldron loved her. She had not, as her sister had done, hitherto resented or despised her lot in life, nor did she resent it now; but compared with her present experience of existence it seemed to have become dwarfed and narrowed; it was almost as difficult to believe that a flower could do without the gracious rain and the sunshine as that existence could be endured without George Waldron's love. It could indeed be said of her that

“Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in its
glowing hands;
Every moment lightly shaken ran itself in golden
sands,”

though any member of the faculty more versed in physical than in spiritual matters, and looking at her from a professional point of view, would have taken anything but a roseate view of her present condition; and, in fact, this actually occurred: for just as she was taking leave of her companion at the door

of the Cottage, Dr. Gray, on his brown cob, pulled up at the sight of them, with a "Good heavens! Miss Mary, what has happened to you?" and without even waiting to have his question answered, ordered her off, in his most dictatorial manner, to bed.

"Why, she is wet to the skin, sir!" he angrily exclaimed to George Waldron (as if that gentleman had been playing on her with a garden engine as a practical joke); and even when he learnt how the thing had happened, his wrath, though it took a more reasonable direction, remained unmollified. The indignation of a good doctor at the indiscretion of a favourite patient, when he can lay the blame on somebody else, is a noble spectacle, and the young man admired him for it, while he trembled.

"What business has a girl like that" (meaning one with so delicate a constitution) "to be on Hendon Jut on such a day as this!" It was one of Miss Martha's proposals—just because Providence and common-sense were against it, and she would not be beaten by them—he would lay a penny. One would really think she wanted to *kill* her sister!

"But I hope, Dr. Gray, you don't apprehend Miss Mary has taken any harm," murmured her late companion anxiously.

"I apprehend she will have taken *cold*, sir, and that in her case means harm," replied the doctor emphatically. "If your sister Maggie had been in charge of an invalid, do you think she'd have been such a——"

Here the window of Miss Martha's bedroom, which looked to the front, was closed with a loud snap, and fortunately rendered the rest of the sentence inaudible.

"Why, you're like a drowned rat yourself, Waldron!" continued the doctor, with professional solicitude, as the young fellow walked beside the other's cob towards The Crag. "You must change at once, and take a glass of something hot."

"Oh, never mind *me*," returned Waldron impatiently. "You will call at the Cottage later on, will you not, doctor? And perhaps you will kindly permit me to look in upon you for five minutes in

the evening, to get your report. You see, I feel myself in some sort responsible"—

"For having saved the girls' lives," put in the doctor.

"Nay, that was Roger Leeson's doing. But perhaps I ought not to have let her walk home."

"The best thing she could have done, where bad was the best. Don't fret yourself on that account."

"But you fear there may be other things to fret about?"

"Well, there is a risk, of course. Her constitution is very delicate. I have only just brought her round, and now that self-willed sister of hers—for I *know* it was her—but there, let us hope that all will go well."

"I hope so indeed," answered the young fellow fervently, then added something in low tones.

"No, no," said the doctor, laying his hands quietly on the other's shoulder, "I *quite* understand; but there is really no sort of necessity. If it should arise, I will bear what you have said in mind; and,

of course, it's between ourselves. A doctor is, or should be, as good as a priest for silence. Now, just run home and change; 'brandy and water hot, to be taken immediately,' is my prescription.—A fine young fellow, much too good for the rheumatism," he added to himself, as he watched him stride away, "and almost good enough for Mary. I think India would be beneficial to her rather than otherwise. It would get her away from Martha, for one thing. The pig-faced lady, I believe, made a fortune for her friends, but, with that exception, a pig-headed woman never did anything but harm to anybody. The idea of taking any patient of mine—let alone dear Miss Mary—to Hendon Jut in a north-east gale! *Confound her!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STORY OF A SIEGE.

MARTHA did not, of course, hear Dr. Gray's "Confound her!" but she had heard enough (before she slammed her window down) to convince her that he would lay at her door any hurt that might befall her sister in consequence of their late expedition. This caused her, however, much more anger than apprehension. Having changed her wet garments, she felt no worse for the adventure herself, and "didn't see why" Mary should be less fortunate; she was even inclined to think that there was an unnecessary fuss made about Mary, for which feeling, however, Dr. Gray was only partly responsible. The solicitude shown by Mr. Waldron on her sister's account (though she quite understood his new relations with her, and accepted them) struck her as

unnecessary and exaggerated; indeed, it would not have been too much to say that she resented them. She did not exactly say to herself, "It is bad enough that Mr. George Waldron should have preferred Mary to myself, but it is absolutely intolerable that he should begin by entertaining a grudge against me for imperilling her precious health," but something of the kind crossed her mind; it was also certain (though also unacknowledged to herself) that from that moment she began to entertain a grudge against *him*.

It is but fair to say that this in no way affected her tenderness for Mary. If jealousy had for a brief space taken possession of her, she had trodden it out with a firm foot. Her feelings with regard to George Waldron had, indeed, never gone far enough to admit of the growth of that noxious weed; so far as her sister was concerned, she owned to herself that there was nothing to forgive, and she forgave her. So soon as she had completed her toilet she paid a visit to Mary's room.

As she knocked at the door, she fancied she

heard a rustle as though someone was crumpling up a newspaper; in this, however, she felt she must be mistaken, for she found Mary, as, after the doctor's orders, she expected to find her, in her bed.

"My dear Mary," she cried, with genuine anxiety, "how flushed you look! Do you feel feverish?"

"Not at all," answered the other, laughing; "on the contrary, I am rather cold."

"Then I am afraid you have taken a chill. I have told Jane to bring you up a cup of hot tea. I should have recommended something stronger, but of spirits I think you and I have had enough to-day."

"Yes, indeed; oh, that good man's whisky!" she shivered; "I seem to taste it still."

"He had some more after he had brought me home. He says it always does him good; and I fancy he takes it always."

"We must not say a word against Roger," said

Mary, "for, after Providence and Mr. Waldron, it is to him we both owe our lives."

"I don't know why you should even put him last of the three," returned Martha drily. "However, I am sure he thought himself well paid for his exertions. By-the-bye, we must ask Mr. Waldron what we owe him."

"Oh, I don't think he would like that, Martha," exclaimed Mary apprehensively. "I am sure it would distress him very much."

"But he didn't pay Roger for rescuing *him!*"

Mary was silent. If Dr. Gray had seen her face he would certainly have said to himself, "*Febrile symptoms.*"

"We are poor, it is true, and he is rich; perhaps he forgot that when he gave that note to Roger; but we cannot allow him, almost a stranger as he is, to remain our creditor."

"He is not a stranger," pleaded Mary; "but it is not that, nor the money which—oh, Martha, I know he would be so hurt, so unspeakably hurt."

Fortunately, Jane here came up with the tea; and when she withdrew the subject was not renewed. Martha had indeed heard quite enough. Her suspicions, if what were, in fact, convictions could be so called, were fully corroborated. About money matters, especially as regarded debts of any kind, she knew Mary to be exceedingly sensitive, and that, in other circumstances, the obligation George Waldron had placed them under would have been insupportable to her; it was clear, therefore, that something had been said, or implied, which placed that transaction on quite an exceptional footing. Mary's solicitude that the young man should not be "hurt" could have but one explanation.

Mary *had* "taken a chill," and was also slightly feverish; but it was not the latter fact that had brought the colour into her cheeks when her sister had knocked at her door. She was in the act of reading a newspaper, which she had only just had time to smuggle under the bedclothes before Martha entered the room. News did not interest her much in a general way, and what she was perusing was

not even the yesterday's paper that ordinarily sufficed for Natchett readers; it was one of a very much older date, and which she had, moreover, read before.

It was a sheet of the *Times* containing an account of a certain incident in the late Indian mutiny, which she kept locked up in a drawer; it had always had an attraction for her, but not nearly so great as it had on this occasion. Now that she had drunk her tea, and was alive again, she was perusing it with the keenest interest. The narrative was headed "Another Arrah," and described the gallant defence of a dwelling-house by Europeans against an overpowering force of rebel Sepoys. The story in brief was this: A small colony of Englishmen, with their families, found themselves cut off by the outbreak of the rebellion from all communication with their fellow-countrymen. The thing had been thought possible, rather than expected, for many weeks, during which all sorts of disquieting rumours had reached them respecting the spread of disaffection. But the European in India is indolent, and averse

to discomfort and discomposure of mind or body. The Sepoys, in the main, it was said, would remain faithful. There was "a scare," no doubt; but things would presently settle down, and it was very unlikely, in the meantime, that the wave of revolt would ever reach so far as Metrapore, their station, where all was quiet and the natives exhibited every sign of friendliness.

One man only—a civil engineer, by name George Waldron—thought differently, and, without attempting to bring his friends over to his views, made his own plans, which his connection with the railway company enabled him to put into execution. Following the example of Mr. Boyle at Arrah, though without knowing it—for the news of its attack and relief had not reached them—he had turned his bungalow into a little fortress. In the centre of it he had caused a well to be dug, and found water—a *sine quâ non*, indeed—and had laid in an abundant store of tinned provisions, with grain and atta. He had collected arms and ammunition, with lead for casting bullets if there should be need for more.

He had fortified the parapets with sandbags, strengthened with earthworks from the well, and made loopholes in the walls. He had even cut down some of the great trees which shadowed the bungalow and formed its chief attraction, lest they should be made use of by sharpshooters to command it. The house, thus metamorphosed into a fortress, was called by his friends Waldron's Folly. But a time came when they were glad to take advantage of Waldron's forethought.

In a time of profound quiet, when there was nothing to alarm them, except, indeed, a long-continued absence of all news that could be relied upon from without, the catastrophe he had provided against, so far as one man could do it, took place. A rumour arrived that two native regiments stationed at Jagpoot, fifty miles away, had mutinied, and were marching on Metrapore. On the second day, swelled by a great crowd of villagers armed with matchlocks, they had arrived there, and every European, rifle in hand and revolver in belt, had fled from his house and taken refuge with his wife

and children in Waldron's Folly. There was no time to spare to bring anything else with them, and some had even a narrow escape of their lives; for the "mild Hindoo," even in domestic service, had suddenly become very undomesticated indeed—in fact, a mere wild beast, save for his cunning—and the whole country rose against them as one man.

To seize the gaol, to release the prisoners, and to plunder the public treasury, were, as usual, the first acts of the new-comers; and within an hour afterwards the little garrison was surrounded and amid a hail of fire. It consisted of thirty male Europeans—all civilians, but most of them excellent shots—ten ladies, and fourteen children. The latter were all located in the central hall, tolerably dark and cool, with the well in the centre, from which the women brought water to their gallant defenders. With such precautions as had been taken these were little exposed to danger, save on occasions when it was necessary to visit the roof, so that their scanty numbers were not diminished by

the fire of the enemy, to which, on the other hand, they replied with the most fatal effect. The advantage of cutting down the trees was now especially apparent, for, though any object that afforded shelter was seized upon by the rebels, they could not approach to within a hundred feet of the bungalow without exposing themselves; the only fear on that score was that it might be carried by a rush. And more than one rush was made. If the worst had come to the worst, and there had been no time to reload, there was a hog's spear for every man (it was afterwards said that Waldron had even provided toothpicks); but fortunately things never came to that pass. There were but thirty men against two thousand, but they were fighting for more than their lives—calm of eye and cool of head, perfectly sure of one another, and thorough masters of their weapons, their multitudinous foes never got within striking distance. But it was sometimes very hot work. What was worst of all was that the dead—the enemy's dead—fought against them: the bodies decomposed in the sun, and the effluvium was in-

tolerable. The wind, however, was mostly in a favourable quarter, and pestilence was averted. But they had no rest, by night or day, and as time went on the little garrison suffered greatly from exhaustion. They never lost hope; they were certain that their countrymen would not leave them to perish; but it did seem that rescue might come too late. Even that case was to some degree provided for, for they inscribed a diary on the wall by way of epitaph. They had fully made up their minds that neither themselves nor their dear ones should fall into the hands of the Sepoys.

On the third day the rebels brought cannon to bear upon them. As at Arrah, the missiles discharged from them were but four-pound shot, which could not break the walls, but they did mischief; every rifleman that was wounded was a loss indeed to them. The children were patient, and the women were brave, but the want of fresh provisions began to affect their health. Then the little garrison made sorties, and brought in sheep. George Waldron always volunteered for this dangerous service. When

remonstrated with—for they knew his value to them—he said, “I shall certainly go, since I have neither wife nor child.”

It was those parts of the narrative which referred to him which set Mary’s heart beating. The rest of it was exciting enough, but when it became personal she felt it personally. She was reading the story of a hero, and he was *her* hero—the same who had that very day, by his wisdom and strength and speed, saved her life, which would henceforward have a new value for her, since it seemed he set such store by it.

As she read on how, after many weeks, those beleaguered people were succoured; how the distant firing was heard that told help was on the way, and then the British cheer that told them it had come, the tears rolled down her cheeks. When the women shook hands with him who had so long been their preserver, she also clasped his hands; when the children clung around him with caresses, she caressed him too.

It was no wonder when Dr. Gray looked in that

evening and saw her flushed face and feverish eyes that he looked grave. Next to Hetty, Mary was his favourite patient, and he had "built her up," as he called it, with his own hands; brought her through certain dangers incident to her delicate constitution, and put her on the road to health; and now that she was menaced with these anew, from no fault of hers, poor dear! as he was well convinced, it was enough to try any (medical) man's temper.

When George Waldron called upon him, with earnest face, later on, according to his promise, he had but cold comfort for him. "Mischief has been done, my dear sir; there is no denying it. What does not hurt those of coarser fibre" (an allusion, we fear, to Miss Martha Vance) "is of serious consequence to these delicate plants."

"But you do not apprehend danger?" murmured the young fellow piteously; one would never have recognised in that pale pleading face the man who had never feared it.

The good doctor was moved to pity. "No, no,

no," he said; "there is no need to think of such things yet. I fear the poor girl's being 'thrown back'—that's all, that's all."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ANXIOUS LOVER.

POOR MARY *was* "thrown back," as Dr. Gray had prophesied. The exposure to wind and wave, the fatigue of her walk to Hendon Head and back, and perhaps the mental excitement she had gone through, had a very injurious effect upon her. It was weeks before she could be brought down-stairs to the little sitting-room looking out upon the bay, and when she got there she was almost as close a prisoner to the sofa as Hetty Waldron.

Hetty, of course, could not come and see her, which was a great deprivation to them both; but when she arrived at that stage of convalescence (as everybody called it except the doctor), she had many visitors. Even when she had been upstairs, Mrs. Waldron had sat by her bedside very often, and Maggie daily. The latter's companionship had

been inexpressibly welcome to her; more so even (she felt a little guilty because it was so) than that of Martha herself. Martha was very kind and unremitting in her attention to the invalid, but her subjects of conversation were not so attractive. Mary did not care to hear that Mr. Adderly had driven over to the Cottage to express his opinion that she was a fool for going to the Jut and catching cold. The injurious epithet did not in the least annoy her, but it caused Martha, whose conscience compelled her to apply it to herself, to "fly out" against their uncle in a manner that distressed her exceedingly.

"The man had not one word of sympathy to offer," she said, "nor one grain of help."

"We don't want his help," pleaded Mary softly, looking round her little room, adorned with flowers, furnished with new books, and supplied with everything suitable to the wants of a much more exacting and fastidious invalid than its present tenant.

"Yes, but he did not know that. How could

he tell that Mrs. Waldron loads you with gifts as her son's almoner? I had a good mind to show him that last tin of turtle soup to shame him; only he has no shame. For all he knows we may be running in debt to the doctor. I wish I was a man and could say things."

In spite of her sex, Martha did indeed contrive to express herself pretty strongly against her uncle, and her wrath was grief to Mary. Of George Waldron Martha seldom spoke, whereas Maggie was full of him.

"You must not mind his sending you things, my dear," she said, in answer to Mary's feeble remonstrances, "because it's his way to be kind and generous; we all have to put up with it; and in your case he will have it that he is partly responsible for your illness; that he ought to have brought the boat more quickly, or not allowed you to walk home. He feels he can never make amends enough for his want of—well, I don't know exactly what—but he somehow feels himself to blame, and to refuse anything that mamma brings you (for that

it is she who does it, and not he, is a point he is very particular about) would cut him to the heart."

"I can't do that," said Mary, with a feeble smile.

"Well, I hope not, indeed. The great thing is to get you well; after that, any remonstrance or complaint you may have to make will be listened to, no doubt, and judiciously dealt with."

The messages, however, Maggie brought to Mary from George might have been delivered by little Susan, the maid; they were kind, of course, very friendly, and even fraternal, but not at all lover-like. He need not have been afraid to make them so, could he have looked into Mary's heart; but he had not the audacity of some men who have not half his courage: he took a very modest view of himself, this young fellow, and was content to bide his time.

Of course, Maggie knew how matters were with him, but he had enjoined silence upon her; he

wanted to plead his cause with his own lips, when Mary was herself again.

Denied the bliss of talking about George, as she felt sure Mary would have preferred to hear her, Maggie hit upon a most ingenious device. She talked about John Dennet and her own engagement instead, a delightful topic in itself to her, and one which she knew (though her companion took the greatest interest in it on its own account) Mary would in a manner transpose so as to suit her own case; she would merely have to substitute George for John in her mind, and every aspiration, plan, device, and castle-in-the-air would have a personal application for her. This is why, I suspect, young ladies, who are not all so wrapped up in their friends as Mary was, take delight in hearing them talk about their Beloved Objects.

John was coming down to pass a few days at Natchett; there was, alas! no reason why he should not come, so far as any interruption to his professional work was concerned; he had none, or scarcely any. Even Maggie's cheerfulness hung

fire, as it were, when discoursing upon that subject. It seemed so hard, when there were so many idle people in the world, that those who really wanted work were unable to get it. John had no interest, and had been so foolish as to engage himself to a young person who was not a solicitor's daughter. It seemed, even if they ever married at all, that *she* would be no longer "a young person" when that took place. She was not so reckless, nor indeed was he, as to rush into matrimony without the means of subsistence; as an engaged couple, they lived on hope, but they were not so foolish as to imagine they could live upon it as a wedded pair. Maggie knew what poverty was, even when supplemented by the generosity of a brother; and her married life could not be so supplemented, as she took great pains to impress upon Mary, because of dear John's independent spirit. He really was a fine, honest, chivalrous fellow, and she had a reason for dwelling upon the fact. She wished Mary to understand that whether George married or not, it would make no difference to them as regarded this

matter; John, she said, would never live on George's hard-earned gains. Even her mother objected to doing so, and, indeed, she could now get on with only a little help, and was exceedingly anxious to see her son settled in life.

This was all quite true, but it was told to Mary to remove any scruples she might entertain about encouraging the attentions of their bread-winner. Mary listened in silence; but she understood it all. Her heart was full of love, yet there was plenty of room in it for gratitude and pity. Every word that was dropped in it fell upon good ground, and was thereafter fated to bring forth fruit a hundredfold. People talk of the froth and foam and emptiness of words, thinking doubtless of that plague of platform speeches from which our nation has suffered so in these later years, but "a word spoken in season, how good it is!" A kind word, gentle and generous and sympathetic, and spoken out of the abundance of the heart, has often altered the whole course of a life.

Sometimes Maggie would talk about John's

“cases”; he had had but three, of the total value of ten guineas; even from a legal point of view they were not very remarkable, but such was her eloquence and the love which inspired it, that they had an interest for her audience of one far above that which John had excited in his juries. Mary was lost in admiration of this patient pair, and contrasted their position with her own with shame and confusion. What had *she* done to win a man’s love—and such a man’s!—in a few hours, and to have all her life made easy for her, while love itself was well-nigh denied to their faithful hearts? It was unjust, and almost shameful!

The view of the subject entertained by the family at The Crag was wholly different. That George had been “greatly struck” with Mary at their first meeting had not, as we know, escaped Hetty’s sharp eyes; and when he had returned, “like a drowned rat,” as she called it, from his expedition to the Jut, it was felt that the matter had become serious. He had dwelt upon his own part in the rescue of the sisters lightly enough; it was

from Mary's lips that they had heard how Martha and herself had been indebted to him for their lives; but his solicitude about the effects of the adventure upon Mary's health was significant indeed, nor did he make any effort to conceal it. His mother and sisters were solicitous also, for they dearly loved her, but his anxiety was extreme; he seemed, as it were, to have exchanged sexes with them in their respective feelings towards her. The women were sorry and apprehensive about her; the man was distressed and filled with despondency and fear. Dr. Gray seldom returned home from his round of visits without finding somebody waiting for him who was not a patient, eager to hear the last news from the Cottage.

Mrs. Waldron was so accustomed to sickness in her own house, and also to see Mary more or less of an invalid, that she was not seriously alarmed about her. She could look forward to a time when all would be well with her, and, as she was well convinced, with her dear George also. He could not have pleased her better

than in giving his heart to Mary Vance. Not a selfish thought crossed the minds of either herself or her girls as to the difference that his marriage might make to them in material matters. It was time that he should marry and have someone to take care of him, who had so little care for himself; and in all their little world there was no one that they would have chosen for him, had they had the choice, so gladly as Mary. India, Dr. Gray had assured them (for he had quietly taken for granted that George's secret was no secret from them, and spoken quite unreservedly on the matter), was likely to agree with her; so that even the one obstacle that presented itself—the unfortunate delicacy of her constitution—was not insurmountable. But for the present, while showing their sympathy for George in a thousand ways, they did not speak to him directly upon the subject. They knew, and he knew that they knew, where all his hopes lay, and that was sufficient for them. If Mary had received no harm from her adventure their behaviour would have been very different. Hetty would not have

spared them; nor would his beloved object herself have been saved from the arrows of her wit. It is probable that there would have been a picture of George in her note-book, flying over the boulders of Hendon Bay without coat or hat, and of the three drenched ones returning from that ill-starred expedition in the cheerful custody of Roger Leeson. But as matters stood "poor dear George" was far too anxious and nervous to be worried, and Hetty kept her arrows in their quiver.

At any other time he would have been delighted to welcome John Dennet, whom he knew to be a most worthy fellow, and tried his best to do so even now; but it was rather a relief to his mind that the young barrister made no great demands upon his time, and was very well satisfied with the companionship of Maggie. George preferred talking to his mother about Mary in a brotherly way—that did not deceive that astute lady for one instant—to conversation on any other subject with anybody. To say that he had not had his love affairs would be merely to add to the mountain of white lies that

is to be found in those pictures which, under pretence of depicting a hero of real life, portray a snow-man; but his heart had not been touched before.

CHAPTER XV.

A HAPPY FAMILY.

WHEN John Dennet arrived at Natchett, Mary was decidedly better; what now chiefly troubled the doctor was not so much the girl's illness as the fact of its having arisen from so inadequate a cause: it showed that she had not outlived that delicacy of constitution which he had begun to hope was a thing of the past. "It is fortunate for her," he said to Mrs. Waldron, "that it is summer weather;" but he did not say it gaily.

"You think she ought not to be here in winter?" replied that lady quickly.

"I don't say that; there are so many things to be considered in such a case, besides mere climate. It is there we doctors make such a huge mistake—I mean in not allowing for them."

"George has twelve months' leave," she said.

The other nodded and smiled gravely. "You may be sure I know all about that. There is to be no obstacle to anything being done; I have *carte blanche*. I never saw a man so—one can't call it 'fallen in love'—so *precipitated* into it."

"Indeed he is. That makes it so shocking to think of danger—the least risk of it."

"Then don't let us think of it, my dear madam: 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof;' Mary is better, she will be downstairs on the sofa to-morrow. Think of *that!*'"

"Is George to see her?"

"I have promised him five minutes—not a second more. It was like giving water out of a graduated glass to a man dying of thirst; but she must be kept from all excitement for some days."

"She is not easily excited, however," said Mrs. Waldron simply. "Our visits, even when she was at the worst, never seemed to do her harm."

"I dare say not," said the doctor drily; "she might hold a public reception at the Cottage to-morrow, so far as that goes, without much hurt,

so long as your son, madam, was not one of the guests."

When George Waldron did see Mary, however, it is doubtful whether he was not the more nervous of the two. She had, moreover, the advantage of him possessed by the saint over the worshipper, since from her prostrate condition nothing was expected of her but to be still and mute; whereas he had to say something of tender congratulation. With this, however, she was quite satisfied, and, though it was not very intelligible, understood it perfectly. Martha had very considerately left them to themselves, and by themselves they would have remained for hours had she not come to remind them of the doctor's orders. Mary's voice was still so weak that the young fellow was compelled to draw his chair quite close to the sofa, but it was astonishing with what cheerfulness he put up with that inconvenience. He had brought her a bouquet, of course; so they shared its fragrance between them. We talk of "pity being akin to love," but in George's heart were love and pity too, and Mary's gratitude for

them could find no expression in words, and needed none. Neither of them, indeed, said anything worth hearing—or at least *our* hearing—but they listened to one another as to the music of the spheres.

“You *are* better, my darling; oh, *tell* me you are better,” he entreated softly.

“How could I help it,” she whispered, “since *you* are with me? And I am so happy—*oh*, so happy!”

It is shameful to have to note such utterances; yet the conversation of life (thank Heaven!) is not made up of wise sayings or epigrams; and just as the trivial fond records of our dear departed ones—the worthless trinket and the broken toy—have a higher value for us than all the wealth of the Indies, so certain foolish words whispered by loving lips are more precious to their hearers than the maxims of Bacon or the proverbs of Solomon.

Those five minutes, which, thanks to Martha, were fifteen, made George Waldron as happy a man—and that is saying much—as he deserved to be. The mirth at The Crag that evening was for the

first time unrestrained. It would have astonished Mr. Adderly—though he protested that no human folly ever did astonish him—to see how that pauper family, as (with the exception, of course, of George, for whose prosperity he had a respect) he called the Waldrons, in spite of their miserable condition, enjoyed themselves. John Dennet, a humorous fellow, somewhat younger and much shorter than George, affected to take him under his protection, as though he had been a new boy at school, and to instruct him in all things pertaining to the “engaged” state. He warned him against the insidiousness of “the young person,” of which he gave examples from his own experience, which brought upon him the wrath of Maggie.

“Not,” she said, “that I consider any man, worthy to be called such, as engaged, until he has given the person he pretends to love an engaged ring, which George has not yet done.”

“It is from economical motives,” explained Hetty. “He has heard of being ‘near’ and ‘dear,’ and is acting up to both his lights and his nature,”

This was hard upon George, who had consulted his sisters upon the matter in question, and been advised that to give Mary a ring would be premature, as taking her acceptance of him for granted.

"I hope you *will* get one for her," continued Hetty sweetly, "because my ring finger is the same size as Mary's, and in case she breaks off the match she must return it, in which case I might just as well have it, you know."

"You are a very wicked and ungrateful girl," said Mrs. Waldron, with such gravity as she could command, "to talk of Mary's 'breaking it off,' even in fun."

"But perhaps George himself may do it, dear mamma: we *know* that he has thrown over the poor Begum; she may not have been young, and she was certainly black, but she has, no doubt, her feelings. It would have been a much more suitable choice. She may have worn her ring through her nose, but she was not dependent upon her lover for supplying it. Morally speaking, she may not have been 'above rubies'—I am not above them myself—but she had

at least plenty of them. After all, there's nothing like 'a good match,' a lady with lots of money."

"Or a gentleman," observed Maggie drily.

"Just so," said Mr. John Dennet; "that's where you are so exceptionally fortunate, my dear."

But to all this tempest of raillery George answered nothing—only looked as pleased as one at a festival in some sunny clime, who is being pelted with comfits and flowers.

The happiest of domestic circles are not, as they flatter themselves, the "serious" ones, whose temper is not always on a par with their high principles, but those in which light-hearted badinage is freely indulged in, and always taken in good part.

John Dennet, though the world thought otherwise, and pitied Maggie for having given her heart to a penniless man, was, in fact, a very welcome addition to the family at The Crag. He was a man of principle, and thoroughly understood their virtues; his nature was humorous; he was not at all depressed by his ill luck, and appreciated beyond

measure the fun and brightness of the two girls; while his knowledge of the world, of which the others, including George Waldron himself, were deficient, introduced to them a new element of interest. He had stories from the Courts which, if not very new, were new to them and well chosen; it was only Maggie (who liked it) that he favoured with the account of his own three famous cases. His admiration of George's character was open and sincere, and would itself have been a passport to their good-will. His place among them seemed to have been made for him, and he dropped into it as naturally as a marble into its hole on the solitaire board. In spite of his profession, which of all callings save the Church is most given to artificiality of manners, he was extremely natural, and, though wishing to give pleasure, showed in doing so no trace of effort. He was not always at his ease himself, but had the art of putting others at their ease. On the first occasion when he was permitted to see Mary, she was delighted with him, and delighted Maggie by telling her so.

In a moment of imprudence, born of pride, Maggie confided this to her sister.

"I am glad you are pleased," said Hetty, with gentle gravity. "Of course no harm *may* come of it, but I confess if I were in your place I shouldn't like it. Mary has taking ways—or, at least, poor George thinks so."

She raised her voice so that George, who was talking to his mother, could not help hearing her.

"What are you pitying *me* about?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing, dear; I *hope* nothing," sighed Hetty; "only John and Mary have not been behaving quite nicely."

It was a small joke, perhaps, but the way she worked it was delightful. The picture of the trouble which she foresaw Mary's conduct (in the character of an accomplished flirt) would bring upon everybody was worthy of the chorus in a Greek tragedy. She compared Maggie—as one whom "no sense of wrong could rouse to vengeance"—to the needy knife-grinder; as to George, who, but for the enchantments of this Circe, might have married his

Begum, she could only pity him from the bottom of her heart; about the measure of John's delinquency she could not make up her mind: sometimes she spoke of him as wicked, sometimes as only weak—the victim of a designing woman.

Mrs. Waldron, while shaking with secret mirth, protested that this was shameful of Hetty.

“Shameful of *me!*” exclaimed the saint on the sofa.

And Maggie declared that if such things were said again she would tell Mary.

“You daren't,” said Hetty; “you know you daren't” (which was quite true). “No, no, let us at least keep the knowledge of this distressing circumstance to ourselves.”

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNDESIRABLE ALLY.

MARY had now other visitors besides her friends at The Crag: several ladies, and also two gentlemen. The Rev. Æneas Harden called pretty constantly. He did not, we are sure, regret that she had never been ill enough to need his presence professionally; but he had often envied the doctor his privilege of seeing his patient. Scarcely had George Waldron himself been more solicitous about her than he had, and he had often called at the Cottage to make inquiries about her or her sister. His visits had not been at all welcome to Martha, who was, however, much too wise, and indeed just, to show her displeasure to him. It seemed such a waste of good fortune that the poor vicar (though, indeed, he was not poor, but well off, where lay the sting of it) should entertain a passion that had become more

hopeless than ever now that George Waldron was his rival, when their respective affections might have been so much more agreeably distributed.

Waldron was not one to boast of his good fortune, and both families were averse to gossip, so that Dr. Gray was, and for a long time so remained, the only depositary of their secret.

The vicar had never been sanguine, but, unaware, of course, that his suit had been anticipated, he showed his passion much more openly to Martha than he had ever done to the object of it. She pitied him a little, for no one could help liking so good a man; but there was a mixture of contempt in her pity. She thought he made rather a fool of himself, which was, however, not the case; he was too modest and humble-minded to be even in a fools' paradise. But he was certainly in his own way (which was a very different one from that of his rival) very much in love. It had distressed him to find that there was nothing he could do for the invalid. Martha had thought it wrong, because it would have been an encouragement to groundless

hope, to permit him even to send her sister flowers. "Mary had too many flowers in her room already," she told him, "to be wholesome."

"Was there nothing that would be acceptable?"

"No, nothing." Her sister was obliged to him for his kind offers, but she had everything she wanted.

The vicar almost regretted that it was not in accordance with the rubric to ask the prayers of the congregation for the sick unless they were dangerously ill. When Mary became well enough to come downstairs, it was only natural that he should have been among the first (he thought, poor fellow! he *was* the first) of her male visitors.

As in George Waldron's case, though for very different reasons, it was a much more embarrassing interview for him than for her. The consciousness of her own engagement almost made her forget that the vicar (though in a very diffident manner) had once paid his attentions to her; and having a most sincere regard for him, and being in a very grateful and tender state of mind, she received him with a

greater display of warmth than she had ever shown before.

She thanked him for the many visits he had made to inquire after her, in tones that were more than gracious, and which went to a destination for which they were far from being intended—his heart. It was not a time for him to respond to her as he yearned to do, but he had never been so near disclosing to her the secret she had guessed, and, alas! almost forgotten. But, fortunately, another visitor, George Waldron, looked in, and put the temptation out of his reach. The vicar liked and admired the young Indian hero, and had he had the least suspicion of his designs would have felt, no doubt, how small was his own chance against him; but the idea of his being his rival never entered his mind. He saw without surprise that he was warmly welcomed; but George's behaviour towards Mary in his presence was very guarded. He gave most of his attentions to her sister, who, on her part, seemed to receive them with genuine pleasure. Since his love for Mary had been disclosed, Martha, like the sensible woman

she was, was making the best of it, and playing the part of the sister that was to be.

Never, in short, had the vicar left the Cottage in a happier or more sanguine state of mind than on the present occasion, and happening, before he had gone half a dozen yards, to meet Mr. Adderly, he greeted him with unwonted warmth.

"You will find your niece better, sir—decidedly better," were his first words, as he shook hands with him, for he took it for granted he was on his way to see her. "I am thankful to say that she seems now on the road to health."

"Indeed; that's well!" As a matter of fact, the squire had not had the least intention of calling at the Cottage, nor did he generally waste his time in conversation with the vicar; but there was something in the latter's tone and manner at the moment that attracted his attention. "Now tell me about her." And he led the way into the public garden, and motioned to Mr. Harden to take his seat beside him on one of its many benches.

Nothing loth, the vicar gave him an eloquent

discourse upon Mary's appearance, state of health, virtues, and accomplishments, which could not, he thought, be uninteresting to such a near relative; and his companion listened to him with unaccustomed patience. What he was thinking to himself, however, was, "Here is the very opportunity I thought of seeking ready to my hand. Here's a second fish worth landing; the other was only nibbling, but this one seems to have swallowed the bait." He thought he saw his way to a good stroke of business. When the vicar told him that he had left George Waldron at the Cottage, he was still more pleased.

"And I dare say they were pleased to see *him*, too," observed the squire. His tone was brusque, even cynical, but that was his way, while his words implied a compliment, which was *not* his way. As a general rule the vicar was compliment proof, but it somehow gave him satisfaction that Mary's uncle should take it for granted that he (Æneas Harden) was welcome at the Cottage.

"Well, of course, sir, everybody is proud and pleased to see George Waldron, as well they may

be. He is as fine a character as one even reads of. He seems to belong to history rather than to real life."

"Yes, yes," put in the squire, who did not want a disquisition upon valour; "but I was speaking of my nieces."

"Well, they are under an especial obligation to Mr. Waldron, which of course does not render him less an object of their regard."

"And he takes to *them*, does he?"

"How could he help it? Mary——"

"Yes, but I mean the other one. Did it not strike you, quite between ourselves, that Martha and he understood one another?"

The vicar started; he certainly did not understand Mr. Adderly.

"Bless my soul!" cried the squire impatiently, "why, surely *you* ought to know what I mean. Is it possible you can be so dense?"

At which the vicar blushed exceedingly. He did understand now that the question which had

been put to him was whether he thought Waldron and Miss Martha were in love with one another.

"Well, really, sir," he stammered, "what you hint never occurred to me. They have only known one another for a week or two."

"What does *that* matter?" exclaimed Mr. Ad-derly contemptuously, as though he himself had been in the habit of falling in love at first sight all his life.

"No, I suppose it does not matter," admitted the vicar humbly, remembering that he had loved Mary from the first, though he had not been so nimble in saying so as it seemed George Waldron was suspected of being in her sister's case. "They certainly seemed very friendly, very. It may be as you say. But the fact is——" here he hesitated, and at last came to a full stop.

"What you mean to say is that your attention was wholly occupied by the other one," observed the squire grimly. "Well, I have no objection to offer to you as a nephew, Mr. Harden, whatever."

It was not a very gracious welcome to the

speaker's family circle, but it was gratifying to his companion.

"You are very good, I'm sure, Mr. Adderly." The vicar had probably never uttered such a falsehood in his life, but he was quite unaware of his delinquency. He was in such a whirl of happiness that he scarcely knew what he said. Not that he cared the least for the squire's approval, but that the expression of it seemed to give his hopes a certain solidity which had hitherto been wanting to them. To have a backer of any sort was a comfort to him. He would have been sorry indeed to owe his success to Mr. Adderly's intervention, but when we are in difficulties, aid from any quarter is acceptable.

"She is a good girl," observed the squire sentimentally; "much more tractable than the other, and not likely to lead you into expenses."

"Oh, sir, I beg you will not talk like that. It is not right, indeed, that we should be speaking of this matter at all. Miss Mary—though always kind, as she is to everybody—has never, you must under-

stand, given me the least encouragement. I am afraid——”

“Tut, tut, what nonsense, man!” interrupted his companion. “What is there to be afraid of? Who is there for her to take *but* you? Not that I mean it offensively, for, indeed, you’re a very good match for her. You have a little money besides your stipend; you’re of good family (not that I care one halfpenny about that myself, but women are such fools). The bishop likes you. Why, perhaps you may be a bishop yourself some day.”

At this glorious prospect Mr. Harden smiled but faintly, then softly murmured, “I would rather marry your niece, sir, than be Archbishop of Canterbury.”

The squire looked at him, with satisfaction struggling with profound contempt. “Very good,” he said; “so you shall. I’ll just look in at the Cottage at once and tell Mary how pleased I am with the whole arrangement.”

“Good heavens! sir, I beg you will do nothing of the kind,” exclaimed the vicar, horror-struck. “There *is* no arrangement.”

"I know; but my speaking to Mary will bring it on; I shall treat it, of course, as the common report, and not say a word about *you*. When it is brought home to her like that, she is sure to acquiesce, and it will save you a world of trouble."

A wooing by proxy has certainly its advantages, and the vicar was not blind to them in his own case; but the idea of the squire being his substitute in such a delicate matter was as shocking to him as the manner in which that gentleman had proffered his services.

"No, Mr. Adderly," he said, with some sharpness, "I will speak to your niece myself when an opportunity is afforded me; and I only hope the result may be in accordance with your somewhat sanguine expectations. I could not endure to think that pressure of any kind, though she is much too well principled to give way to it, had been put upon Miss Mary."

"He is a greater fool than I thought he was; he really *is*!" was the squire's reflection, but he saw

that the vicar's pride was touched, and made haste to conciliate him.

"As for pressure, my dear sir, if you mean by that compulsion, it is out of the question. My niece is of age, and is quite at liberty to choose for herself. However, we'll talk of this another day, Mr. Harden, and in the meantime, since you wish it, it shall go no further. There is, fortunately, no possible rival in your case, so there is no danger in delay; and now just one word about those periwinkles. They are mine, every one of them, as indisputably as every brick in Natchett Hall is mine; but I have been thinking over the matter, and to oblige *you*, Mr. Harden, I am content to waive my claim."

"But, indeed, my dear sir, it has nothing to do with me," protested the vicar, smiling. "I never ate a periwinkle, much less one of *your* periwinkles, in my life."

"They are very good, though," observed the squire, unwilling to hear his property depreciated, even at the moment of parting with it; "with a little bread and butter and a pin, which you need only

borrow, they make a most cheap and appetizing meal; and now, thanks to you, as you will be quite justified in telling your parishioners, they will be cheaper than ever."

"But they never did pay anything for them," observed Mr. Harden. He was very willing to conciliate the squire, but he had a certain gentle obstinacy, such as one often sees in the other sex; but in this case it only forbade him to tamper with the truth.

"But that was because they stole them, sir!" shrilled the squire. "Is it possible that you can defend theft, which is directly forbidden, I believe, in one of the commandments?" When angry, Mr. Adderly always aired his infidelity, and pretended to be more ignorant of religious matters than he really was, which brought him down to a low level of information indeed. "You must admit that to take oysters out of my bed—I mean, of course, my oyster-bed," interpolated the squire irritably, for the other was staring at him with astonishment, not unmixed with alarm—"is a felonious act. Then why should not my periwinkles be equally sacred?"

"The question is—and you are begging it, sir—whether they *are* your periwinkles," replied the vicar. He had his forefeet, so to speak, straight before him; his ears were laid back, not in malice, but in determination. It was not in mortal man to move him from his moral position, and the squire had the sense to see it.

"Well, well, we will not argue the matter, Mr. Harden. The periwinkles are yours" (the vicar shook his head), "or, if you prefer it, your parishioners', and there is an end of it. Right is nothing when one wishes to oblige a friend."

This, too, was a statement open to controversy, but the vicar was in no humour to take it up. He shrank from combat, unless, as in the late instance, he was pushed with his back to the wall. It was clear that his companion only meant to be conciliatory, and it was a frame of mind which, even for its rarity, it was his duty to encourage.

To say that he was also conscious that his private interests were deeply concerned in being on good terms with the squire is only to acknowledge that he

was human. He held out his hand, which the other took, and worked up and down, which, knowing no more of friendship than a savage, he thought to be a sign of amity.

“You must come and see me soon, and report progress, Mr. Harden. I shall be glad to see you any day—after lunch—at Natchett Hall.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE VICAR FINDS AN ALLY.

THERE are, no doubt, immense advantages in isolation. The Hermit of old had in many respects an unassailable position. He had nothing whatever to think about but himself, and that he indulged in so much speculation about his future was set down to his credit; nobody called on him even in the afternoons; he could eat onions (and did so) without any misgivings as regarded others. If anybody came, it was to admire him. He always believed himself to be *the* Hermit (and when he was so may be justly entitled the Champion Charlatan of the Middle Ages); he was probably as happy and self-contented as egotism can make a man—and it can go a very long way. But then the Hermit really *was* a hermit, and kept himself to himself. Isolation (as in certain scientific

experiments) must be complete to produce these great results; there must be no half-measures. If one wishes to be entirely independent of the world, one must not mix with it, even occasionally.

Hitherto Mr. Adderly had got on very well in his own way (and had certainly economized) by shutting himself up at Natchett Hall and knowing nobody. But now he had, unfortunately, begun to interest himself in the affairs of other people. It was true he had done so solely with the design of benefiting himself—of saving one hundred pounds a year; but, nevertheless, it was a great mistake. One day the servants' dinner—a bullock's heart—took a much longer time to cook than usual; the bullock had had, perhaps, a hard heart, or the fire (the coals were very cheap coals) was inadequate to its work; and the squire consequently dined at half-past two instead of half-past one. As ill luck would have it, the vicar took advantage of the squire's invitation "to call at the Hall after lunch" on that very day, and arrived before lunch. "A merry heart," we are told, "goes all the way;" but a

bullock's heart, however merry, goes but a very little way among half a dozen people, and Mr. Harden (with the servants) made the seventh. He was, indeed, far from hungry—for something had occurred to spoil his appetite—but when Mr. Adderly had said, as he could not help saying, "You will have some lunch?" he had replied "Thanks" mechanically. The meal, therefore, had still further to be deferred, to the detriment of the host's temper, and, supplemented, to that of his purse. This was misfortune number one caused by Mr. Adderly's going out of his way to promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures; and he had now to learn that he had not succeeded even in that philanthropic object.

"Well, I hope you have got good news for me—that is, for yourself," added the squire hastily, "in respect to that matter of which we were talking together some weeks ago. I hear that Mary is up and about, and I suppose you have had your opportunity."

"I have had my opportunity," said the vicar, in low, despondent tones; "but I am sorry to say the

result has been unfavourable. I have nothing to complain of—far from it,” he continued, in reply to the squire’s ugly look; “I have been treated by your dear niece with the utmost kindness and consideration, but I have failed to gain her affections. I have come here, according to promise, though I had hoped to have other news to give you, and to thank you once more for the good wishes you were kind enough to express for me; but it is all over, and nothing more need be said about it.”

“But I shall have a great deal more to say about it,” exclaimed Mr. Adderly. “It’s all a mistake; you’re under some foolish misunderstanding. She cannot have been such a born idiot.”

“There is no mistake, sir,” replied the vicar gravely. “And I must ask you to restrain yourself, in my presence at least, from any observation that reflects upon Miss Mary Vance’s conduct; she has behaved like an angel.”

“That’s just what I complain of,” remarked the squire grimly; “be good enough to tell me, how-

ever, exactly how she did behave: what did she say when you asked her to marry you?"

"She said, sir, with a tenderness and pity I can never forget, but in words that are too sacred for repetition, that it was impossible that she could do so. She spoke of her regard for me in a way far beyond my deserts, but she made it only too plain that—it is very painful to dwell upon this matter—it could never be as I wished; that—there were insuperable obstacles."

"What obstacles?"

"I did not ask; it was enough to hear, and to feel, as, alas! I do, that they *were* insuperable. I had no right to press the matter, and I did not."

"Well, I can tell you what the objections were," said the squire curtly; "the chief one was the difference in your pecuniary positions. Mary has the pride of the—well, a fallen angel; her sister has not a scrap of it. Martha would ask me for an allowance of five hundred pounds a year to-morrow, if she thought there was the remotest chance of getting it, and when I had given it her would think it

ought to have been a thousand. That's the sort of girl *she* is. Martha is, so to speak, a rogue, while Mary is—well, quite the opposite. She does not like to go to a rich husband empty-handed."

"Oh, sir, it is impossible that such a consideration—why, good heavens! what is money compared with a possession so priceless as herself?"

"Just so; that's *your* way of looking at it, and a deuced foolish way too, if you will permit me to say so; but her way is different, and infinitely more foolish. You're half a monk, you see, and don't understand the ways of women as I do. Now, you leave *me* to deal with Mary."

"But indeed, sir, I cannot permit that," answered the vicar firmly; "it would be very dishonourable in me, having received her decision and bowed to it, to send another person to importune her."

"Stuff and nonsense! I shall do nothing of the kind. It is simply that the girl is not aware of her own position—takes too modest a view of it. Not

that I am *promising* either her or you anything, mind you——”

“Indeed, sir,” put in the vicar, with a flush, “I don’t want your promises.”

“Quite right, for you would not get them if you did. But without entering into details, to which your natural delicacy (very properly) renders you averse, it is obvious, as concerns my niece and myself, that there may be eventualities. Martha would be quick enough to see them—I wish you had fancied Martha, by the way, instead of the other; she will have luck, I believe, that she doesn’t deserve. Well, Mary is blind to all that, and it shall be my task to enlighten her. It will not be even necessary to mention your name in the matter; but, speaking of matrimony generally, I shall let her know that she ought not to take too modest a view of her position in the world. It is the sense of inequality, I am convinced, that has placed this gulf, as you imagine it to be, between you and her, and a few words from me will bridge it over.”

“Indeed, sir, I don’t think it will,” hesitated the

vicar, with a sigh. He had very little confidence in the squire's intervention, and ought to have had none at all; but a drowning man clings to a straw, and he did love Mary so dearly.

"Well, at all events, I'll do my best for you, Mr. Harden. Take a glass of—water, I think you prefer, and let us drink to the success of our little plan."

It was rather a lugubrious proceeding; Mr. Adderly was at no time what the citizens of the Great Republic call a "festive cuss," and had never proposed a toast—even in toast and water—in his life before. Mr. Harden's kindly face was still sicklied o'er with the pale cast of rejection; he had a secret conviction that no good could come of the partisanship of his new friend, though, like Mary herself, he had always taken a much too charitable view of him. If he had known him as he really was, he might have prayed for him, but he would never have been his guest: the partaking of that bullock's heart with him would have seemed "a feast of blood," such as takes place in Africa previous to the sacrifice of a virgin. But misfortune

acquaints us with strange hosts—causes us to trust in strange allies. Whatever might be Mr. Adderly's general character—so ran his guest's reflections—he had certainly shown himself friendly to him in this matter, and could have no other motive for his conduct *but* friendliness, and the conviction that he, the vicar, would make his niece a good husband.

As to the latter, we may conclude that it did not enter much into the squire's calculations; and as to the former, the vicar was mistaken indeed. The motive of Mr. Adderly's new-born love for match-making was wholly a selfish one; he desired "to make two lovers happy," and even two pairs of them—solely for his own sake. He really did believe that the reason for Mary's rejection of the vicar was the one he had given for it; and he honestly proposed to do away with her objection—though not altogether by honest means. He could not bring himself to make her a promise of any material help, even after his death; not that he would have had the slightest scruple in making it, and breaking it, but because he would not eat his own words. He

felt no difficulty, however, in making a pretence of eating them: he had always told his nieces that they would never have a penny from him beyond what they had already received, and from that position he did not mean to budge; but he intended to speak of that matter to Mary in terms still vague and indefinite indeed, but very different from those he had hitherto used. The quieting of his conscience, which was in a very domesticated condition, and easily appeased, never gave him much concern, but he really flattered himself in this case that the end justified the means. At the worst, he thought he was about to commit a pious fraud; but then Mr. Adderly had very peculiar ideas about piety.

It may be thought strange that he should give himself so much trouble about so small a thing; but nothing in the way of saving—if it were but sixpence—was beneath his attention. It is so with all rich men of small but grasping minds. Since they cannot be millionaires—though it does not require much intelligence even for that—they take an intense pleasure in adding a few pounds to their in-

comes, or, which is the same thing, in cutting down their expenditure to the last shilling. Yet it is often these very men whose virtues as "charitable donors" (after death) are longest kept in remembrance among their fellow-creatures, so far as congenial brass and stone can do it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PORTRAIT.

It was a day to be marked with a white stone when Mary was well enough to leave the Cottage and be taken in the Natchett fly down to The Crag to see Hetty. They had not met, of course—as Hetty was a prisoner to her couch or her invalid carriage—since it was arranged they were to become sisters-in-law. Their interview was very tender. All Hetty's arrowy wit was laid aside to welcome her, as, indeed, it would have been in any case, for her visitor still bore evident traces of her late indisposition. But Hetty could not alter her nature, and her

congratulations were a little different from those of other people, though not less sincere.

The two girls conversed together in low tones; cried a little, as girls will do when there is any especial reason for rejoicing; but it was not Hetty's way to remain long in the melting mood.

"My dearest Mary," she said, "you look like a very charming specimen of eggshell china, that has met with an accident, but has been beautifully mended."

"You had better not let George hear you say that," remarked John Dennet; "she is not cracked, you know."

"Cracked china, if you knew anything about it, sir," replied Hetty severely, "is even more valuable than whole china. John comes from London, my dear, and is frivolous; you must not mind him."

"I don't," said Mary; "I am so perfectly happy that I don't seem to mind anything or anybody."

"A nice look-out for George," murmured Hetty plaintively. "However, I suppose it is the right

frame of mind for India. I hope so, for the Begum's sake."

"And who is the Begum?"

"Oh, if George has not told you, I ought not to have said a word about her," said Hetty, in confusion. "She is an independent princess, who is so foolish as to wish to be otherwise, and make him her Prince Consort. It is a great sacrifice to all of us that he should have thus—well, I won't say thrown himself away, but thrown her over for your sake. But we don't grudge it, my dear. Mamma will tell you all about it."

"Come, you must not keep Mary all to yourself," said George. "I am sure you must have discussed our future sufficiently."

"I was speaking of your past, my dear," returned his sister. "If," here she heaved a sigh of regret, "it be really past."

"I am certain she has been telling Mary about the Begum," cried Maggie, clapping her hands.

"I thought it my duty," said Hetty mournfully.

"My dear Mary," interposed Mrs. Waldron hastily,

"I need not tell you that the whole story is a fiction from beginning to end."

"I should not have cared, my dear Mrs. Waldron, even if it were true," laughed Mary. "It would have been paying me a great compliment."

"Well, I have seen something of the evils of a long engagement," said Hetty, with a glance at John; "but I could not have imagined that a short one could have so demoralized what I used to think a noble nature. The poor thing may go the length of a Suttee, no doubt, for all you care; at all events, here's her picture, done from George's enamoured description of her. The ring through her nose is said to be worth a lac of rupees." She drew forth a portrait from a hiding-place in her couch. "Perhaps you would like to burn *that*, George."

He took it with a smile, then suddenly his face became rapturous. "Oh, Hetty, this is kind of you, indeed!" he whispered, and stooped down and kissed her.

Hetty's eyes filled with tears, though, true to her-

self to the last, she murmured, "I have given him the wrong one."

It was not, indeed, a portrait of the Begum, but of Mary herself. It had been her labour of love for the last three weeks.

"I wanted you to have your first wedding-present from my hand, dear George; though it is but a poor return indeed for——" The thought of his many kindnesses to her was too much for the fragile invalid. For the first time in the memory of the little household, Hetty broke down.

It was a touching scene, for love was in every feature of it. There could have been no gift more acceptable to her brother, and it touched his heart from many sides. The drawing, which was in coloured chalks, might have been better executed, but by some happy chance the artist (which far better ones often fail to do) had caught Mary's expression exactly; the one she had worn on the day she had first met her betrothed, when Mrs. Waldron had observed of her that she had never looked so beautiful. Her face had the hue of health, which

now it lacked, though its present delicacy had as great a charm of its own, and its veiled tenderness and admiration were admirably rendered.

“Now, if I saw this in an exhibition drawn by a stranger,” said George tentatively, with his grateful eyes on Hetty, “I should think a hundred guineas a cheap price for it; but being your work, my dear——”

“I do believe he is going to say something rude about amateurs,” said Hetty, with a colour in her cheeks that was, however, aroused by no such apprehension.

“No, my dear,” put in Mary quietly, “he was going to say that, being yours, it was beyond all price.”

“That is exactly what I meant to say,” observed George, drawing a long breath.

Mary had done him her first service as a help-mate by saving him from a great mistake. He had been on the brink of offering Hetty a large sum for her handiwork. His mind was as delicate as her own, but generosity to those he loved was so habitual

with him, that it had ceased to have the qualifications that belong to giving, and became merely self-indulgence. He now saw at once that, but for Mary, he might have offended Hetty's sensitive nature very much, and his gratitude for his escape was paid where it was due.

"Your picture, my dear Hetty," he said, with a glance at Mary, "will only be less dear to me than the original, and more than that I cannot say."

Whether Hetty was aware of the peril in which he had stood was never known. As "nothing ever escaped her," as her family was wont to say, it is probable that *that* had not done so, but she never alluded to it.

When, however, Mary and Maggie found themselves in the latter's room, when the guest was putting on her bonnet for departure, the circumstance was reverted to.

"What an escape, thanks to your presence of mind, poor dear George had!" cried Maggie. "How *could* he?"

"It was only that he is always wishing to do

those he loves a kindness," said Mary, with glowing cheeks.

"Of course it was, my dear," answered Maggie soothingly; it seemed strange to her that anybody should be defending George against herself, but it gave her pleasure, too; it was quite the right and proper thing, even if he was in the wrong, for Mary to do. "Of course that was the reason; who should know that better than I? If it is more blessed to give than to receive, George should be the happiest man in the world; as, indeed, thanks to you again, he *is*." And with that she kissed her. "And how like your portrait is, Mary—so charmingly like!"

"Except that it is a great deal too flattering."

"I don't think so at all, and I am sure George does not think so. You look less delicate—though, of course, as Hetty would say, there is nothing *in*-delicate in it—than before your illness; but that is just as you will look again."

"Well, Hetty must now draw just such a picture as that of you, Maggie, for John."

"But not as a marriage-present, I fear," sighed

Maggie, "for these many years. You know that I do not grudge you your happiness, Mary, but it did just give me a little pang at the moment. It made me think of the difference between your case and mine. I sometimes think I shall be old and gray before dear John will be able to call me his wife. He will love me then, I know, as much as he does now, poor fellow; but how truly is it written that hope deferred——"

"Don't, *don't!*" interposed Mary, with her kind eyes full of tears; "it makes me feel so heartless to be happy when you talk like that, Maggie. It seems as if I was *robbing* you; surely *something* might be done. I am sure dear George——"

"Hush, hush!" put in Maggie, in her turn; "you are going to make the same mistake, and from the same cause—a loving generosity—that he did. Indeed, between ourselves, George did make us an offer—a most noble one; but John—and he did quite right—would not hear of it. George has nothing but his salary—a large one, it is true, but not too large for his own needs; and even if it were

otherwise, as, indeed, it was when his proposition was made (so that *you* have nothing whatever to do with the matter at all, my dear), the thing was impossible: John could not take George's money. We are very happy in each other's love, after all; only now and then the thought of the long waiting, and the seeing no end to it, is a little trying. But, come, we must take you downstairs, and return you to dear George, or he will never let me have you, even for five minutes, again."

It was the last time, as, indeed, it was the first, that Maggie had bemoaned herself—as she called it—about her long engagement to Mary, but the latter never forgot it. Her tender heart was henceforth full of schemes—all vain and baseless—for helping John and Maggie, and its happiness was not a little dashed by her inability to do so.

When the girls went downstairs, George was not in the impatient mood in which Maggie had painted him. He was still enraptured with what Hetty called his "new toy," and his mother "that lovely

portrait." It really did in after-years, in some degree, console him for her absence.

"Since it seems to have taken George's fancy so much, Mary," said Hetty, "suppose I do another portrait of you for Uncle Adderly."

"Certainly *not!*" exclaimed George.

"Pooh! pooh! There is nothing to prevent a great artist from painting duplicates. Haydon did scores of portraits of Napoleon at Elba with his arms folded—doubtless to give him a local colouring."

"Is it possible that she has made a pun?" inquired John, in horrified accents. "All is over between us, Maggie. I am sorry for it, but I will not be connected, however remotely—and the relationship seems remote, Heaven knows!" he put in grimly—"with a young person who can so demean herself."

"And who also," observed George, "wants to give a picture of Mary to Mr. Adderly."

"And why not?" inquired Hetty innocently. "He is her only relative but one, and dotes upon her even more than on the other. It is probable

that he would not give much for Martha's picture, but for Mary's—his own Mary before Mr. George Waldron was ever heard of—he would probably give a long price."

"Forty shillings," ejaculated John contemptuously.

"How little he knows your uncle, Mary!" murmured Hetty pathetically. "John's mind runs upon damages—probably in breach of promise cases, for he wants to get off his bargain, as you saw just now—that bring costs. If I do not take a mistaken view of your dear uncle, he would shrink with scorn from offering forty shillings for a picture of his favourite niece."

"George, you must stop her," exclaimed Maggie, laughing in spite of herself. "It is your place now to see that Mary is not teased."

"What have I said—what have I done?" inquired Hetty plaintively. "I am defending Mary's uncle, and George's uncle——"

Here George roared.

"From the suggestion that he would offer forty

shillings for Mary's picture. If Mary says, upon her honour, that she thinks he would offer forty pence, I retract and apologize."

It was not possible to argue with Hetty, far less to repress her. Even Mary herself could not help laughing at her pretence of enthusiasm, expressed with such supernatural gravity, for Mr. Adderly. As for the rest of them, they were convulsed with merriment. If they had known what was going on at the Cottage at that moment, and in connection with the gentleman in question, it is probable, to use the children's phrase, that they would have "laughed on the other side of their mouths."

CHAPTER XIX.

SPEAKING HER MIND.

MARTHA VANCE had never been a happy girl. Unlike her friend Hetty, hers was not the merry heart that goes all the way, nor the half of it. Her nature had dissatisfaction in it, to begin with, and as she grew up the sense of wrong was added to

her sense of lack. She brooded over matters even after her intelligence had shown her the necessity of submitting to them. She really loved her sister, and could not be said to grudge her the great good fortune that had happened to her, even though she had hoped it had fallen to her own lot. She felt that it was an excellent thing that Mary was so well provided for, and there was nothing in her behaviour to George Waldron which suggested anything but the kindest feelings. She knew him to be a generous, brave, and tender-hearted man, but in her heart of hearts she did not like him. No one suspected this, and the necessity for concealing her real feelings towards him the more embittered them. Such things happen everywhere in households. To respect and not to like is as common (almost) as to love without respecting. If taxed with such a feeling, Martha would have denied it with indignation, for she scarcely acknowledged it even to herself; but it existed, nevertheless. Sorry as she would be to lose her sister, the fact that her absence would entail that of George Waldron also

was a secret source of consolation to her. She would have been shocked indeed if even conscience had whispered to her, "You hate the sight of that man;" but life never seemed more intolerable to her than when he was present. She felt a sense of relief that afternoon, when Mary for the first time drove down to The Crag, because it did away with the necessity of receiving him at the Cottage. He would see Mary home, no doubt, but there would be no excuse for his remaining; she need not make conversation for him, or pretend not to hear when he poured his soft nothings into her sister's ear.

It was, therefore, with irritation that, within an hour of Mary's departure, Martha heard the wheels of the fly again; why could not the enamoured pair have billed and cooed at The Crag instead of returning to the Cottage to do it? George's income was large enough to admit of his keeping the fly at the door, even at half a crown per hour. She was little less disgusted, when Susan came up to her room, with "Please, miss, Mr. Adderly has called, and wishes particular to see you," to find that the squire

had arrived, and not, as Mrs. Waldron called them, "the young people."

She was even less in the humour for making herself agreeable to her uncle than usual; but one thing which she had always shrunk from with respect to him since the day he had brought her up in his carriage from the Spa she was now no longer apprehensive about. He had no doubt somehow or other heard of her sister's engagement—his wanting to see her so "particular" convinced her of it—so that she would at least be spared any reference to the plans the old fool had had in his head as to her own union with George Waldron. Any allusion to *that* matter would, indeed, just now, have been intolerable to her. She cast one look in her glass—as every woman would do even if she were about to receive as a visitor the Father of Evil—and ran downstairs to meet her uncle.

"Well, how are you?" said Mr. Adderly, holding out his stiff fingers as usual, "and what is of more consequence, how is Mary?"

It was not a courteous greeting, and though

Martha did not expect courtesy, the squire's rudeness grated on her more than usual; she knew, of course, that he disliked her sister less than herself, but his demonstration of it was, in her present state of mind, especially offensive to her. He had come, of course, to congratulate Mary on her engagement, for since she had done so well for herself, she had doubtless already become of some consequence in her uncle's eyes.

"Mary is much better," answered Martha; "she is gone out for a drive for the first time to-day."

"A drive! Well, I suppose, then, that somebody has been found to pay for the fly; that is just what I came about."

"About paying for the fly?" inquired Martha drily.

"What a fool you are!" exclaimed the squire irascibly, "as if I cared one halfpenny who pays for it, so long as it isn't me."

"I don't think Mary will need to apply to you to defray this extravagance," she answered quietly.

"There is someone now to take that burthen upon his own shoulders."

"I'm deuced glad of it!" said the squire. "So she has turned out a more sensible girl than I took her for, after all, has she? Well, I think her young man might have called and told me as much. I am come here a day after the fair, it seems."

"Perhaps he thought you were not much interested in the matter."

"That's impossible, miss, because he knows I am."

"I don't understand you."

"You don't 'understand' me!" Here he endeavoured to imitate Martha's icy voice and distant manner, with no great success, it must be owned; but he certainly did succeed in making himself most insolent and offensive.

Martha's temper was getting shorter and shorter, like a slowly-burning fuse.

"Well, the fact is—for there is now no longer any need for secrecy in the matter," he continued—"he called at my house some days ago with the

object of gaining my good offices in the matter, for at that time there seemed to be some hitch about it."

Martha could scarcely believe her ears. There seemed no necessity for her uncle to add lying to his various accomplishments, and yet that George should have called at the Hall, after the opinions she had heard him express of the squire, seemed incredible.

That he had done so to bespeak his good word was, of course, ridiculous; but was it possible that George Waldron, for all his supposed independence of character, had an eye to the main chance after all, and had made an effort to conciliate the rich uncle of his destined bride? Martha would not have been sorry, perhaps, to find out an imperfection or two in this paragon, but, in the present case, at least, she felt he was blameless. No, he never *could* have done such a thing.

"At the risk of your again making merry with my stupidity," she said coldly, "I must once more

say that I do not understand this matter. There must be some mistake somewhere. If Mr. George Waldron ever called at the Hall, he has certainly never said one word to us about it."

"I am not talking about George Waldron. If you could keep yourself and your own affairs out of your mind for half a minute, miss, it would be a blessing to your friends. Not that I have any objection to see the young man, if he means business; but just now I am giving myself some trouble about your sister and Mr. Harden. I gather, of course, that she has now definitely accepted him."

"My sister Mary, sir, is engaged to Mr. George Waldron."

"What? Not to the vicar, but to the other?" exclaimed the squire, in amazement. "Well, upon my life, that's quick work! One hears of being off with the old love before we are on with the new, and I do hope she's hooked him. At all events, there's one of you off my hands. Since Waldron has thrown you over, it seems, for your pretty sister, why shouldn't *you* take the vicar?"

"You are a mean, insolent, cowardly hound!" observed Martha calmly.

"I am a *what?*" said the squire, starting from his chair.

"A mean—insolent—cowardly *hound!*" repeated Martha, with great distinctness. Her passion was beyond his, as a white heat excels a red one. "You will die in a year or two at furthest, and nobody will regret you; and if there is such a thing as a place of future punishment, even with but one person in it, you will be that one person."

Of course it was but a brief pleasure; but Martha used afterwards to say that this telling her uncle what she thought of him was the happiest moment in her life. It certainly afforded her the most intense enjoyment.

If, overcome with the rage that consumed him, he had fallen down in a fit and expired on the spot, her satisfaction would have been complete. But Mr. Adderly's habit of body was spare, and he survived the experience. What his coachman thought of him by the time they got home, and what his

butler thought of him as he sat over his meat tea, cannot be here set down. The servants' hall had never before listened to such *ana* about "master" as were retailed that night. The post had gone out; but the squire could not rest before he had sat down and written a certain letter, the composition of which afforded him some slight relief.

Some people as they lie sleepless in their beds are haunted by a rhyme or a line of blank verse; the squire did not read poetry, so this had never happened to him; but he was haunted all that night by a line of prose.

"You are a mean, insolent, cowardly hound!" recurred to him with the tenacity of the famous refrain of Mr. Mark Twain's, "A three-trip slip for a two-cent fare."

He had only very seldom had the advantage of hearing what people really thought of him, and Martha's outspeaking made a great impression upon him—so great, indeed, that even the reflection that he would henceforth save fifty pounds a year—for, of course, she would never again see one penny of

her uncle's money—by her insolent impertinence, did not console him for the insult. There was also another reflection that positively made him shiver with rage and fear. Contrary to the general belief, the squire had hitherto omitted to make his will, though Death, as he had always protested, was the end of all things—so vehemently that one might perhaps have said of him, "Methinks he doth protest too much." Moreover, it had been commented upon that that munificent gift of a public library comprehended quite an unusual number of works upon longevity. He had, in fact, rather shrunk from making any post-mortem arrangements. But now that it was just possible, if he should die that night, for instance, that half his hoarded wealth should go to the very woman who had so insulted him, whom he had always disliked, but whom he now hated with "the hate of hates," he cursed his foolish procrastination.

Not another twelve hours would he pass tormented by such a hideous thought. Instead of sending his letter to his lawyer by the morrow's

post, he would despatch a messenger in the morning to bring him to the Hall at once. Having decided upon that important step, the squire's mind quieted down a bit, and he fell asleep at last when the birds were just beginning their matin song.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SMALL END OF THE WEDGE.

As was only reasonably to be expected, George Waldron saw Mary home that afternoon, and even when they reached the Cottage went in with her, for a few words, as he said, with "dear Martha." If he had really built his hopes on that, he was doomed to disappointment, for Martha was upstairs "with a sick headache." Mary had never known her sister to have such a thing in her life; and she did not for a moment believe that she was suffering from anything of the kind. Every woman understands that the calamity in question is merely used by her sex as a figure of speech. When a creditor, or a neglected suitor, or another woman whom they

detest, makes a call' on them, they have sick headaches, and can see nobody. In Martha's case, however, Mary knew that there must be something much more serious to keep her above stairs. She found that Mr. Adderly had called in her absence, and at once arrived at the conclusion that that gentleman had "upset" her sister.

"It is most unfortunate, my dear George," she said pathetically; "but dear Martha is always more or less put out by Uncle Adderly's visits."

"Upon my life I can't blame her!" responded George laughingly. "I should be put out myself if I were in her place, and should feel very much inclined to put *him* out. I am bound to speak of your relatives with respect, my dear; but really your Uncle Adderly——"

There was a sudden pause, followed by what grammarians call a "labial" sound.

"If you stop me like *that*, my darling, I shall continue to abuse him. It is a positive premium upon malediction."

Indeed, George felt rather grateful than other-

wise to Mr. Adderly for having been so good as to call.

Mary had some little difficulty in getting rid of her swain; but no sooner was it accomplished than Martha presented herself in the parlour. She might not have had a sick headache; but, if so, it was evident that something else—and that no light thing—was the matter with her. Her drawn and haggard face was painful to look upon; but what was worse was the sullen fire in her eyes.

“Mary,” she exclaimed, “I have a favour to ask of you.”

“A favour! You may be sure, my dear, that if it is within my power——”

“It *is* within it,” answered Martha, in a voice at once harsh and hoarse. “Never mention Mr. Adderly’s name again within my hearing.”

“Oh, Martha, what has he done?”

“He has done nothing; it is what he has *said* that has separated him and me for ever. I will never forgive him; no, not even when he is dead and——”

"Hush, for Heaven's sake," implored the trembling girl. "Think, think of what you are saying!"

"I am thinking of it, because I am thinking of *him*. There must be a hereafter, if it is only to punish that base wretch. I am sorry to shock you, Mary. It is selfish of me to thus distress you when your health is so delicate, but if I do not speak out I shall die. You ask me what he said, but I cannot tell you; to hear it would be worse for you than anything. He has heaped upon me unspeakable insult. He is a mean, insolent, cowardly hound, and I told him so in so many words."

"You told him so!" repeated Mary mechanically.

Such news would have been terrible enough in any case; but to hear it after the experiences of that afternoon—the contrast of it with the happy home life of which she had so lately been a witness, and of which she had been permitted to partake—was too much for her in her enfeebled condition, and she fell back on the sofa in a dead faint.

When she came to herself she knew, from the cushion having been removed from beneath her

head and the wet coolness on her face, that means had been taken for her restoration; but Martha was sitting at some distance from her with her eyes fixed on the empty firegrate, and an expression on her face which made Mary shudder, though she knew it had nothing to do with her or hers, for it was the embodiment of a relentless hate.

"Do not let anything Uncle Adderly has said distress you, dear Martha," she murmured softly. "And even if you said what you told me to *him*, he can only take away his hundred a year from us. I am quite certain that need not trouble us now."

"It does *not* trouble me," was the fierce rejoinder. "There was a time when I would have taken from his unwilling hand anything I could get; but now, should he offer me a thousand-pound note to-morrow, I would tear it up, and feel a greater pleasure, as I threw the fragments in his face, in knowing that he had lost it, than if he had given me half his fortune. Trouble me! I would rather beg in the streets of Natchett than be indebted

to him for another shilling. If I could kill him, slowly——”

“Oh, Martha, Martha, may Heaven forgive you for such revengeful thoughts!”

“I cannot prevent my thoughts, and I would not if I could,” was the cold rejoinder. “My only regret is that they cannot be deeds. The mean, insolent, cowardly hound!”

These words kept ringing in Martha's ears continually, just as they did in those of her uncle, but with a very different effect: there was a music in them that soothed her; it was with intense satisfaction she reflected that she had at last told Uncle Adderly what she thought of him—an aspiration she had entertained for years. But unhappily she felt by no means even with him on that account; she did not know how furious her words had made him, or how they stuck in his memory. She thought that the cutting off her allowance would more than make up to him for the insult she had put upon him, a reflection that increased her hate and rage.

“You spoke of our hundred a year being taken

away just now, Mary," she said presently; but I have no reason to suppose that he will punish you for my offence, and I should be very sorry if such were to be the case."

"Do you suppose I am going to take Uncle Adderly's money *now*, Martha," inquired Mary gravely, "after he has said to you things so shameful that you cannot repeat them to me? Even if I wished to do so base a thing, I am sure dear George would never permit it."

"Still, we must remember that your refusal would be the very thing to give the old miser pleasure, and we don't want to give him pleasure, but pain."

"I cannot say I want to give him pain, Martha. It is wicked to want to do that to anybody."

"Then I am very wicked just now," was the dry rejoinder; "there is nothing too bad for him in my opinion—*nothing!* Perhaps you are right about his money, after all; when he sends you yours, as usual, we will return it, and I will tell him again he is—well, what I think of him."

Mary saw that it was useless to argue with her sister; she now only wished that she would carry out her first idea of never mentioning her uncle's name; but the subject had a terrible fascination for Martha. Mary was glad to excuse herself from listening to her denunciations of the squire on the score of fatigue, and to take refuge from them in her bed.

In the morning things were but little better; she had had a bad night, but it was clear that her sister had passed a worse one. Martha looked weary and worn and black under the eyes, but her tongue was as active as ever, and spoke out of the abundance of an angry heart. The fact was that the more she thought of her behaviour to Mr. Adderly, the more she felt that he had got the better of her. Though her views were the same as to the rejection of anything from his hand with scorn, the common-sense which underlaid her nature pictured the inconveniences which the withdrawal of his allowance would necessarily entail upon her. She hardly possessed enough means of her own to

purchase the barest necessities of life, and though she had taken no notice of Mary's hint with respect to George Waldron's assistance, she was resolute to decline it, should it be offered. She would almost as soon have taken alms from the squire himself.

Martha Vance had a good deal of the grasping character of her uncle in her nature, and but little pride; but, while very willing that her sister should benefit by George's ample purse, she felt it impossible to take one coin from it for herself. This reluctance did not at all arise from her knowledge of the poverty of his belongings, or what they might think of his money going "out of the family," but simply from her own feelings towards him. Unreasonable as it was, now that they had quarrelled with their only relative, and George was their sole prop and stay, she somehow disliked him more than ever.

"You must not tell George what has happened," she said to her sister. "I mean as regards the gulf that now exists between ourselves and that man at the Hall. Everybody will know it soon enough;

but the actual cause of the rupture, be so good as to remember, is my secret."

"But George is sure to ask me about it," pleaded Mary. "He knows that Uncle Adderly called here yesterday, and he will naturally suspect——"

"You mean," the other interrupted sharply, "you told him that *you* suspected that that was the cause of my indisposition. You may say what you like to Mr. George Waldron respecting your own affairs, but I wish you would not speak to him about mine, Mary."

"Oh, Martha, how can you talk like that of him, when he has our welfare so much at heart!"

"He has *your* welfare, of course, at heart, and his own; you and he will soon be one; you and I, it is true, have hitherto been one, but George and myself are not one. Be so good as to remember that."

Considering the look and tone which accompanied that statement, it was not likely Mary should forget it. Her dreams about Martha's sisterly feel-

ings towards George, and the comfort he would be to her in this new calamity, were rudely dispelled as she looked at her, while that word "hitherto," which seemed to treat their former relations as a thing of the past, wounded her still more deeply.

"Is it possible," she exclaimed, "that my engagement with George Waldron seems to separate you from me, Martha, in any way? If I thought so, half my happiness in it would be destroyed."

"There would still be enough left, considering how happiness is distributed, to satisfy any ordinary mortal," answered Martha, with an unmirthful smile. "As to your engagement, that will not last for ever, and when you are married we shall certainly be separated—by the ocean. Of course you may say that space cannot divide us. That is all very well in poetry and novels, but, as a matter of fact, the old proverb, 'Out of sight out of mind,' has a great deal of truth about it."

"That is just what George says, though I am sure he is a living instance to the contrary; and I will tell you now what he meant to tell you himself, that

what he proposes to do is to offer you a home with us in India, so that you and I may live together just as we do now."

She spoke with earnestness and joy; the proposal was "so like dear George," and had, in fact, removed from her the only pang she felt in the prospect of their marriage. She entertained no doubt that Martha would hail it with unmitigated pleasure.

"No, dear," was the unexpected reply, given with great coldness; "it is very kind of George, of course, to make me such an offer, but it is quite out of the question that I should accept it. Be so good as to tell him so, and thereby save me from the unpleasantness of having to do so myself."

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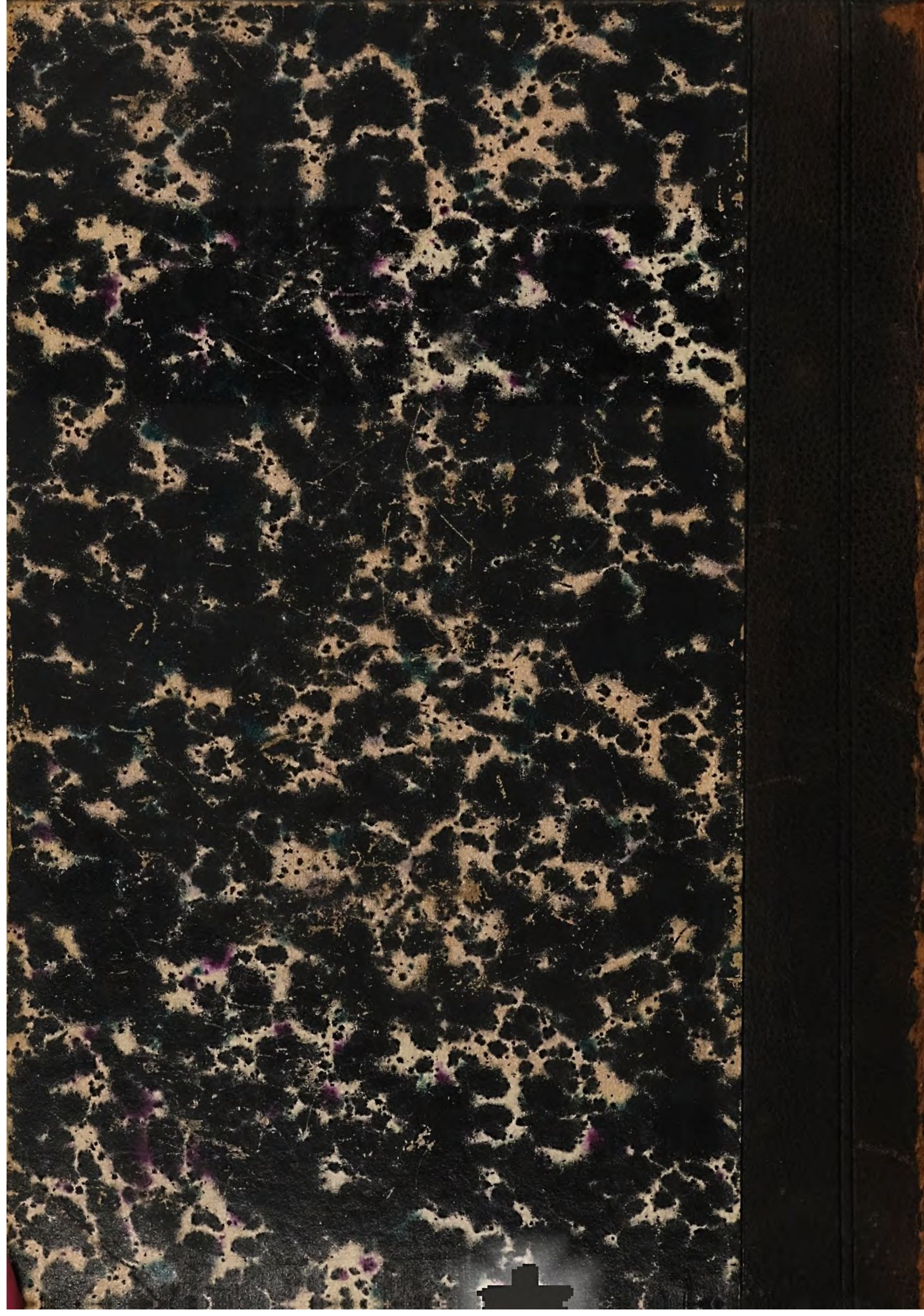
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